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THE UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

SOCIALIST REALISM IN THREE SOVIET  
UKRAINIAN NOVELS

by

Elaine Louise Harasymiw

A THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES  
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The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies for acceptance, a thesis entitled, "Socialist Realism in Three Soviet Ukrainian Novels" submitted by Elaine Louise Harasymiw in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.



## ABSTRACT

Yakiv Bash, Oles Honchar, and Mykhaylo Stelmakh are representative Soviet Ukrainian novelists required to write according to the method of socialist realism--a theory that is the result of certain political, social, and economic developments in the Soviet Union. Each writer chooses particular aspects of Soviet society and attempts to interpret and portray that reality in terms of Marxist-Leninist philosophy. Their respective novels selected for examination, Haryachi pochuttya, Praporonotsi, and Pravda i kryvda are marked by certain distinct adherences to and departures from socialist realism which have been determined primarily by Soviet cultural policy fluctuations.

The investigation shows that official orthodoxy in a work makes it more socialist-realist in nature but less aesthetic. The features of socialist realism are in fact only superficially embodied into the structure of the three novels and fail to enhance the artistic value of the works. Their incorporation, at the expense of the usual artistic qualities, has a detrimental effect on the works as a whole. The problem posed before each writer is to combine political ideology with minimum aesthetic standards required to make the novel an effective social tool. None of the writers has achieved his initial purpose of writing an effective didactic novel, yet the literary merit of at least some of their writing is not negligible.



Two questions remain open concerning socialist realism. One is whether it is possible to write an ideal socialist-realist novel. The other is whether socialist realism is effective as a literary method. This thesis concludes that the imposed formula undermines artistic value but has not paralyzed individual creativity.



## PREFACE

An abundance of material on the theory of socialist realism exists both in Soviet and Western sources. These theoretical works, however, do not differentiate between the practical application of socialist realism in Soviet Ukraine and Soviet Russia. European and North American scholars have concentrated their efforts primarily on socialist realism in Russian literature. Because few scholarly works on Soviet Ukrainian literature exist in English, this study aims to illuminate some of the basic traits characterizing three typical Soviet Ukrainian novels by Mykhaylo Stelmakh, Oles Honchar and Yakiv Bash, and to draw some conclusions about the theory of socialist realism as a literary method. Three books have been heavily relied on concerning the history of the theory of socialist realism: George S. N. Luckyj's Literary Politics in the Soviet Ukraine, 1917-1934 (New York, 1956), Herman Ermolaev's Soviet Literary Theories 1917-1934: The Genesis of Socialist Realism (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1963), and Harold Swayze's Political Control of Literature in the USSR, 1946-1959 (Cambridge, Mass., 1962).

Both Soviet and Western scholars have neglected Soviet Ukrainian prose and have given preference to the poetry of that country. Soviet critics cite examples of characters, situations, and plots in prose primarily to illustrate certain features of



the theory to which they subscribe; consequently, the usefulness of their interpretations is limited. Non-Soviet analyses and criticisms are practically non-existent, except for those of Ivan Koshelivets' and M. Hlobenko who make either passing or extensive references to both Honchar and Stelmakh. Bash is virtually unknown to the Western reader.

This study begins with an outline of Soviet literary developments since 1917 and a description of the main features of the theory of socialist realism. The next three chapters contain biographies of the three authors and observations about their major works in which the styles and dominant motifs and themes are described. Here the works are examined in terms of the requirements of socialist realism with particular emphasis on the success or lack of success of their incorporation. The last chapter involves a comparison and evaluation of the three works based on information given in the preceding chapters, and draws conclusions about the theory of socialist realism from that information.

If this thesis purports to have any value it lies in its exploration of a relatively neglected area of Soviet Ukrainian literature. While this study is not comprehensive, it attempts at least to make a contribution, however small, to the serious non-polemical study of Soviet literatures. An effort has been made to approach the topic objectively by examining the three novels in terms of their own theoretical foundations rather than subjecting them to Western standards which they were never



designed to meet. This does not, however, exempt the novels from being measured against universal standards of literature, for while the socialist-realist theory relates specifically to "socialist" society alone it still aspires to produce great world literature. This study shows that the theory is making only halting progress towards this end.

In writing this thesis the author has had certain assistance for which she is grateful. In particular, she wishes to acknowledge Professor Y. Slavutych's encouragement, consideration, and advice. To Professor J. Laychuk she is indebted for his close scrutiny of the manuscript and his efforts toward improving its style and content. She also wishes to thank Professors M. Gulutsan and O. Zujewskyj for their valuable criticism.



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TRANSLITERATION TABLE

Russian and Ukrainian	English	Russian and Ukrainian	English
а	a	р	r
б	b	с	s
в	v	т	t
г	g	у	u
д	d	ф	f
е	e	х	kh
ё	e	ц	ts
ж	zh	ч	ch
з	z	ш	sh
и (Russian only)	i	щ	shch
й	y	ъ	"
к	k	ы, ый	y
л	l	ь	(omitted in proper nouns)
м	m		the letter 'm'
н	n	э	e
օ	o	ю	yu
պ	p	я	ya

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## INTRODUCTION

This thesis is an examination of three Soviet Ukrainian novels; Haryachi pochuttya by Yakiv Bash, Praporonostsi by Oles Honchar, and Pravda i kryvda by Mykhaylo Stelmakh. Its purpose is three-fold: (1) to analyze these novels on the basis of the theoretical tenets of socialist realism; (2) to determine the success of the authors in executing their task of writing a socialist-realist novel; and (3) to ascertain the literary value of the novels as works of art according to standards suggested by certain Soviet literary figures. In this way it is hoped that two further questions will implicitly be answered. First, what is socialist realism in practice? Second, how effective has socialist realism been as a method of prose writing?

The political history of socialist realism reveals not only basic trends characterizing that method during various periods of Soviet history but, also, the basic problem that confronts the writer in writing a socialist-realist novel. The Soviet regime has elaborated a literary doctrine and developed practical devices to confine the writer's imagination and creativeness within specified concepts of art. This restraint imposed upon Soviet writers activates forces that weaken the effective power of literature and reduce its usefulness as a tool for Communist control. Maintaining a balance



between these contrary tendencies is a central problem of Soviet literary politics.<sup>1</sup> The problem that confronts the Soviet writer is that he fulfill those requirements of the method of socialist realism. In essence, this means that he must write a work sincerely imbued with Party spirit (dedication to communist principles) that contains not only the quality of intelligibility to the masses but also pedagogic potential. A work must be capable of educating and transforming man in the spirit of socialism. It must contain the required communist ideology and simultaneously meet the minimum aesthetic standards of good art.

Ukrainian literature has definite, established traditions illustrated in the language, subject matter, and literary devices employed by writers of this century. Although a great number of writers have been liquidated<sup>2</sup> or have simply vanished without a trace, still major talents remain in Ukrainian literature. The novels selected for consideration are representative of Soviet Ukrainian prose in their themes, the period in which they were written, and the literary calibre of their authors. The themes concern three significant historical events in Soviet life: the construction of a hydro-electric dam during the First Five-Year Plan, the

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<sup>1</sup>Harold Swayze, Political Control of Literature in the USSR, 1946-1959 (Cambridge, Mass., 1962), p. 25.

<sup>2</sup>Yar Slavutych, The Muse in Prison: Eleven Sketches of Ukrainian Poets Killed by Communists and Twenty-two Translations of Their Poems (Jersey City, N. J., 1956), p. 13.



Soviet people in the Second World War, and the building of a model collective farm after the War. The novelists include two with distinguished reputations in the U.S.S.R.--Stelmakh and Honchar--and one of lesser renown--Yakiv Bash.

Examined individually, the novels will be measured against the general principles of socialist realism even though they reflect two distinct phases in the history of that theory, Zhdanovism and the "thaw." Only when comparisons and contrasts are made among the three novels will they be viewed as products of their respective eras. Some light is thus shed on the nature of the theory and its inherent practical contradictions. The present study reveals that the novelists in question are not equally successful in their task. Furthermore, none of the works makes a good novel of socialist realism: they are either unconvincing as works of art, or their divergence from the socialist-realist method is of such a magnitude that they cannot be considered, strictly speaking, works of this method. That the method has not, in these particular novels, been effectively applied seems to be due to either the vagueness of its formulation or simply the difficulty of meeting all its requirements. This ineffectiveness indicates that literature in practice cannot be used as a social instrument and still retain those qualities that make it good art.



## CHAPTER I

### HISTORICAL, POLITICAL, AND PHILOSOPHICAL BACKGROUND

#### Soviet Literary Developments: 1917 to the Present

The development of literature of Soviet Ukraine can only be properly understood when seen against the background of Ukrainian history,<sup>1</sup> since the trends marking this literature reflect the historical events of the nation. On November 20, 1917, Ukraine was declared a separate Ukrainian People's Republic (Ukrayinska Narodna Respublika), and on January 22, 1918, it became an independent state. The Revolution in Ukraine was not only a revolution for social justice, but, unlike its Russian counterpart, also a war of national independence.<sup>2</sup> Consequently, the period from the time of the Bolshevik Revolution in 1917 to 1921 was characterized by a struggle between Ukraine and Soviet Russia which continued after the end of the Civil War and was in turn reflected in the literature of that time.

According to George S. N. Luckyj's investigations, "literature was the only means of expression for the new national spirit."<sup>3</sup> It became an instrument for educating the

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<sup>1</sup>George S. N. Luckyj, Literary Politics in the Soviet Ukraine 1917-1934 (New York, 1956), p. 5. Cited hereafter as Luckyj, Literary Politics.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 23.



people in history, language, and political theory. By the time of the Revolution Ukrainian literature had become firmly established. The leading writers were not only imbued with the energy, optimism, and strength released by the Revolution, but also clung to older traditions founded in the heritage of the cultural renaissance of the nineteenth century. Writers such as Tychyna and Rylsky, born in the last century and formed before the Revolution, were deeply influenced by I. Franko, L. Ukrainka, and M. Kotsyubynsky, and became involved in the idea of national freedom for Ukraine.<sup>4</sup>

Because a part of Western Ukraine (Galicia) was under Austro-Hungarian rule, some Ukrainian literature was exposed to Western Europe. This open window gave Ukrainian literature access to trends in European literature and thought generally. As a consequence, Ukrainian literary schools ceased to be dependent on Russian influences.<sup>5</sup> Prior to 1917 Marxian theory had not yet penetrated into Ukraine.<sup>6</sup> Four distinct trends in poetry had developed under both West European and Russian influences: (1) symbolism, (2) neo-romanticism, (3) futurism, and (4) neo-classicism. The period 1917 to 1921 was marked by the flourishing of Ukrainian literature, having as its impetus the liberation movement.

The imposition of Marxian literary theory, however,

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<sup>4</sup>Ivan Koshelivets', Suchasna literatura v URSR (New York, 1964), p. 44.

<sup>5</sup>Luckyj, Literary Politics p. 24.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., p. 29.



began with the establishment of Soviet rule in Ukraine in 1919. The Revolution, in Lenin's terms, was to encompass not only the economic and social spheres of life, but the cultural sphere as well. Literature was required to become a part of the Cause of the proletariat. Lenin stated that "one cannot live in a society and be free of that society. The independence of the bourgeois author, artist, and actress is merely a pretended independence from the money-bag, from the bribe, from being kept."<sup>7</sup> In accordance with Marxism, literature was viewed by leading political figures as an ideological phenomenon, part of the superstructure erected over, and determined by, the economic basis: "Literature was to serve as an instrument for the education of the masses in the spirit of socialism."<sup>8</sup> The concept of proletarian culture, however, was not clearly defined, nor were communist leaders unanimous as to the possibility or necessity of a proletarian culture. Trotsky saw no need to foster an isolated proletarian culture in the Soviet Union. Lenin viewed the creation of a proletarian culture as fantastic and dangerous, and advocated a cultural revolution instead, which meant a basic re-education of the masses.<sup>9</sup>

With the introduction of the New Economic Policy (NEP)

<sup>7</sup>V. I. Lenin, "Partiynaya organizatsiya i partiynaya literatura," Polnoe sobranie sochineniy (5th ed.; Moscow, 1960), XII, 104.

<sup>8</sup>Herman Ermolaev, Soviet Literary Theories 1917-1934: The Genesis of Socialist Realism (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1963), pp. 1-2.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., p. 15.



in Ukraine in 1923, a second renaissance in Ukrainian literature took place. Although the struggle between the communist and national forces continued, one of the stipulations of Proletcult, a large, well-organized network of literary workshops that existed until 1923, was that there must be no interference in its activities by the Party.<sup>10</sup> Since the attention of the Party was engaged in strengthening its position in Ukraine, the intelligentsia, taking advantage of this favourable situation, concentrated its efforts on strengthening the literary-cultural rebirth. Communist control was relatively weak. Many literary organizations and hundreds of poets and writers made their appearance. While Lenin was alive, the Party could not openly support any specific proletarian and cultural organization.<sup>11</sup> The major groups were several: (1) Lanka (The Link), a group of fellow-travellers; (2) ASPANFUT, the Pan-Futurists who later split into two groups, Askk (Asotsiyatsiya Komunisticheskoyi Kul'tury--Association of Communist Culture) and Zhovten' (October);<sup>12</sup> (3) Pluh (Plough), an organization whose members depicted the life of the revolutionary peasantry;<sup>13</sup> (4) Hart (Tempering), which aimed at the propagation of Communist ideology and the creation of one international Communist culture;<sup>14</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Luckyj, Literary Politics, p. 36.

<sup>11</sup> Ermolaev, Soviet Literary Theories, p. 2.

<sup>12</sup> Luckyj, Literary Politics, p. 40.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., p. 46.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., p. 47.



and VUAPP (Vseukrayinskaya assotsiatsia proletarskikh pisateley--All Ukrainian Association of Proletarian Writers), an organization of Russian writers living in Ukraine, the first such literary organization having a Muscovite orientation.<sup>15</sup> In 1925 VAPLITE (Vil'na Akademiya Proletars'koyi Literatury--Free Academy of Proletarian Literature) came into existence with the Ukrainian Communist, Mykola Khvylovych as its leader. Consisting of former members of Pluh, Hart, and other groups, it aimed at producing works of quality with emphasis on aesthetic criteria. Daringly, VAPLITE turned towards Western Europe for guidance and proclaimed the desire to develop a Ukrainian literature independent of Russian literature. To counteract its progress, in 1927 VUSPP (Vseukrayins'ka Spilka Proletars'kykh Pys'mennykiv--All-Ukrainian Union of Proletarian Writers) was organized with Russian support.<sup>16</sup> The years 1925 to 1927 were characterized by a severe dispute between the Party and VAPLITE: the latter was charged with "bourgeois nationalism". Khvylovych regarded art not as a means to political ends, but as a method of cognition, as "an aesthetic rather than a political outlook."<sup>17</sup>

By 1928 most of the literary organizations had been disbanded. The last legal form taken by VAPLITE was the Prolitfront organization (Association of the Proletarian Literary Front).<sup>18</sup>

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., p. 55.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., p. 60.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., p. 97.

<sup>18</sup> N. Hlobenko, "The Period Between the Two World Wars: Central and Eastern Ukraine," Ukraine: A Concise Encyclopedia, ed. Volodymyr Kubijovyc (Toronto, 1963), I, 1051.



The period from 1929 to 1933 was characterized by the consolidation of Stalinist control over the State and Party apparatus. This had a detrimental effect on the development of Ukrainian literature. The Party, on August 15, 1931, adopted an important resolution on the matter of publishing.

The character and content of a book must completely correspond to the tasks of socialist reconstruction. A book must have a fighting spirit and political reverence; it must aim at the widest masses of the builders of socialism with Marxist-Leninist theory and with technical and productive skills. A book should become the most powerful weapon for educating, mobilizing, and organizing the masses for the tasks of economic and cultural organization. The quality of a book must satisfy the cultural demands of the masses, demands which are ever-growing.

The form of a book, its content and language, must harmonize with its purpose and with the level and the demand of the group of readers for whom it is intended.<sup>19</sup>

The Soviet Union, according to some, had now reached a new historical state, that of socialism. "The years after 1929 witnessed psychological and moral changes in the USSR . . . which led to the development of the earlier internationalism of the Revolution and its leaders into something which can be best described as Soviet patriotism or even as Soviet nationalism."<sup>20</sup> The Soviet authorities began to impose a new role upon literature; henceforth, it was to demonstrate the leading role of Moscow in historical progress and serve the interests of the Communist Party. Stalin was acknowledged as the infallible authority in Marxist theory, and literary theories

<sup>19</sup>"Pro vydavnychu robotu," Krytyka, No. 9, 1931, p. 4, cited by Luckyj, Literary Politics, p. 168.

<sup>20</sup>Max Beloff, The Foreign Policy of Soviet Russia: 1929-1941 (2 vols.; London, 1947), I, 178.



were to be assessed exclusively on the basis of political merit. Stalin's aim was not so much to create new theories, as to destroy those existing ones<sup>21</sup> threatening the power of Moscow and the Party. He attempted to define his own theory of culture and establish its place within the framework of the socialist state. Theories or philosophies of literature were open to attack. Stalin's intervention brought about the liquidation of proletarian and all other literary organizations on April 23, 1932, "under the pretext that there was insufficient contact between the writers and the masses."<sup>22</sup> Writers were criticized by the Party for individualism, bourgeois spirit, and, most important, nationalism.<sup>23</sup> The critics in power refused to consider any extra-literary factors in a work, such as the general literary milieu, historical and cultural influences, the author's philosophy, religion, and anti-Communist political views.

The years 1933 and 1934 were marked by an intensification of the newly established policies toward literature. Every point in Stalin's speeches was to be taken as a literary directive.<sup>24</sup> A strong effort was made to play down national differences and to establish as all-Soviet singularity of

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<sup>21</sup>Ermolaev, Soviet Literary Theories, p. 93.

<sup>22</sup>Hlobenko, Ukraine: A Concise Encyclopaedia, I, 1051.

<sup>23</sup>Koshelivets', Suchasna literatura v URSR, p. 103.

<sup>24</sup>Ermolaev, Soviet Literary Theories, p. 162.



culture. Theory and ideology were used as means to a political end--the centralization in Moscow of absolute power over the whole Union.<sup>25</sup> The year 1934 marked the formation of the Association of Soviet Writers of Ukraine<sup>26</sup> which affirmed socialist realism as the basic method of Soviet imaginative literature and literary criticism. Literature of the thirties was required to present more dynamic plots and larger spectra of society than literature of the twenties whose subject matter was chiefly the Revolution and the Ukrainian-Russian War of 1917-20. Now problems were to be continually related to actual themes of war and the Revolution, to social and national relations under the conditions.<sup>27</sup> A writer had to deal with the "essential trend of reality," its advance towards socialism. He was encouraged to glorify heroism, revolutionary devotion, and the materialization of the socialist dream as essential traits of the Soviet epoch. To the Party, idealization meant propaganda and the glorification of its cause and activities. Writers were not as free to deal with their subjects or to imbue their works with as much individualism as they could a decade before. Because they had to conform to strict official requirements, there occurred a sudden decline in their literary activity as well as in their artistic achievement between the years 1933 and 1941.

The period of the Second World War saw a slight deviation

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<sup>25</sup>Luckyj, Literary Politics, p. 199.

<sup>26</sup>Hlobenko, Ukraine: A Concise Encyclopaedia, I, 1051.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid.



from the norm that was imposed upon the writers. Relaxation of censorship and Party dictation encouraged a sense of freedom among writers. They either fought actively for their country or became war correspondents at the front. Literature had only one purpose--that of aiding the victory over the enemy<sup>28</sup> by mobilizing the people and evoking their feelings of patriotism. Ukrainian writers, in Luckyj's words, "were allowed and even encouraged to extol Ukrainian patriotism as a means of rallying the people. . . ."<sup>29</sup> Works of this period were monumental and epic in style, and their subject matter varied: the Communist Party and its leaders, the Civil War, socialist construction, or, simply, the Second World War.<sup>30</sup>

It was not long, however, before the Party swiftly reasserted its position of absolute control in all the arts. Soviet critics began to detect a pronounced element of nationalism in the works of a number of writers and soon denounced that very literature they had encouraged only a few years earlier. Again Ukrainian writers were attacked for emphasizing and idealizing Ukrainian history and for "misunderstanding" the true meaning of patriotism. A number of writers were condemned for "nationalistic errors" at the Plenum of the Association of Soviet Writers of Ukraine in 1947.<sup>31</sup>

<sup>28</sup>Max Hayward and Leopold Labedz (eds.), Literature and Revolution in Soviet Russia, 1917-62 (New York, 1963), p. 94.

<sup>29</sup>George S. N. Luckyj, "Ukrainian Literature," Books Abroad, III (Spring, 1956), 138.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid.

<sup>31</sup>G. Boiko-Blokhyn and B. Krawciw, "During and After



Zhdanov, a long-standing member of the Politburo, was instrumental in directing the development of literature during the next decade. He accused Soviet writers of devoting insufficient attention to contemporary Soviet themes and of providing mere entertainment for the readers<sup>32</sup> instead of hard, solid propagandistic works. In an address, he proclaimed that literature, in catering to the masses, must employ literary forms meaningful to them (narodnist'), fulfill its purpose in Soviet society by subscribing to the world-view of the proletariat (klasovist'), and support the policies of the Party and State (partiynist').<sup>33</sup>

The Party demanded novels which would inspire people to feats of labour, which would present the question of labour as a patriotic responsibility of the Soviet citizen. Soviet literature was required by literary authorities to portray the heroic work and struggle of the Soviet nation in building a Communist society.<sup>34</sup> Themes frequently exploited for these purposes were the War and its battle scenes and sieges and

the Second World War: Soviet Ukraine," Ukraine: A Concise Encyclopaedia, I, 1069.

<sup>32</sup>Avraham Yarmolinsky, Literature Under Communism: The Literary Policy of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union from the End of World War II to the Death of Stalin ([Bloomington, Indiana] n.d.), p. 19.

<sup>33</sup>Ernest J. Simmons (ed.), Through the Glass of Soviet Literature (New York, 1953), p. 253.

<sup>34</sup>B. S. Buryak (ed.), Istoriya ukrayins'koyi radyans'koyi literatury (Kiev, 1964), p. 9.



exploits of partisan bands, the industrial complex in which people work as a unit towards heroic achievements under the guidance of the Communist Party, and the collective farm, another aspect of the Communist society. Historical themes were frequently utilized to show the nation as a creator of history by revealing the nature of the class struggle throughout history. Themes were taken from past events and viewed in the light of present-day problems. Events were interpreted in terms of Marxist-Leninist dialectics in keeping with the Party's strict requirements of socialist realism. The cult of Stalin and Lenin, a tendency to exaggerate the role of the leader in the historical process, attained great heights during this period.<sup>35</sup> Since 1956, however, this has been duly censured in retrospect by today's Soviet critics.

"Cosmopolitanism", another major failure of Soviet writers, was linked with "bourgeois nationalism" and chauvinism;<sup>36</sup> at a plenary meeting of writers in 1949, a campaign was waged against writers guilty of this particular offence.<sup>37</sup> In 1951 a new persecution of Ukrainian literary men began because of their alleged nationalism and "lack of enthusiasm in Sovietizing the cultural process of Ukraine";<sup>38</sup> it was felt that this

<sup>35</sup> Buryak (ed.), Istoriya . . ., p. 394.

<sup>36</sup> Yarmolinsky, Literature Under Communism, p. 79.

<sup>37</sup> Boiko-Blokhyn and Krawciw, Ukraine: A Concise Encyclopaedia, I, 1069.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., p. 1070.



nationalism was not compatible with Soviet patriotism. Writers were warned that one of the tenets of socialist realism is the portrayal of Ukrainians as one member in the family of the Soviet peoples, among whom friendship and equality prevail, and that the strong influence exerted by Russia on this singular family throughout history was and is always for its good. The Eighteenth Congress of the Communist Party of Ukraine in 1954 reported that, although a number of important works had been produced, "there was a 'lag' of Ukrainian literature behind reality, a preponderance of historical themes with 'insufficient treatment of the themes of the present time,' and a colourlessness and superficiality of the imagination."<sup>39</sup>

The period from 1956 onward has been characteristically labelled the "thaw". Literary critics and political figures began to realize that the presence of ideological orthodoxy in literary works was not enough to make literature a politically useful instrument. They began to stress artistic quality and mastery in literature, and protested against the lack of real conflict and human interest in fiction. Writers were encouraged to deal with actual problems and conflicts encountered in life, to incorporate in their personages features that would make them more convincing and real. With the emphasis on humanistic pathos and on strengthening the realistic tendency it was thought that Soviet literature would achieve its

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<sup>39</sup>Boiko-Blokhyn and Krawciw, Ukraine: A Concise Encyclopaedia, I, 1078.



mission more successfully--the education of people in the spirit of Communism.

Critics turned their attention to the shortcomings of writers: specifically, the latter were denounced for exaggerating the cult of Stalin, for portraying life under Stalin too unrealistically. Critics demanded more truthfulness in the portrayal of Soviet citizens in both their public and private life and that more attention be given to concrete material improvements. Literature, as a result of these criticisms, began to depict the negative character with more depth in character analysis. An increasing concern for the inner life of the individual, an interest in his emotional and private experiences resulted.<sup>40</sup>

Another "fault" of writers was their susceptibility to influence by alien theories. Abstractionism and formalism were considered decadent and, according to the socialist-realist literary method, rested on the belief that art is not dependent upon society and is not called to serve the people. At the same time, at the Twentieth, Twenty-First, and Twenty-Second Congresses of the Communist Party, Soviet political figures reminded writers that development of literature and art is inseparably bound with social developments generally, that their duty consisted in revealing the richness and greatness of the socialist reality.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>40</sup>Hayward and Labedz (eds.), Literature and Revolution, p. 129.

<sup>41</sup>Buryak (ed.), Istoriya . . ., p. 428.



The Second World War continued to be a dominant theme, but writers viewed it more in terms of the philosophical questions that arose from it. Historical themes were also popular, particularly those that dealt with the October Revolution. Communal life was stressed as a fruitful area of investigation that might yield new potential for a socialistic society. Another subject frequently utilized was industry and the industrial proletariat. New subject matter that came to the forefront was the depiction of the professional class and the intelligensia.

In spite of the liberalizing trend of the late fifties and early sixties, the "thaw" still witnessed works that were very much alike in their basic approach to life. This was because there was only one reality, one truth, one correct way of perceiving things: in effect, writers chose to be pedagogues.<sup>42</sup>

The Third Congress of Soviet Writers held in May, 1959, indicated a significant improvement in the international status of Soviet literature. The Congress dealt with questions pertaining to national literary forms, the organic unity of realism and romanticism in works of socialist realism, the development of genres, and the propagation of literary policy changes. Participants discussed internationalism, the fraternity and solidarity of workers, the struggle against imperialism, and, apart from these, artistic mastery.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>42</sup>Hayward and Labedz (eds.), Literature and Revolution, p. 129.

<sup>43</sup>H. F. Buhayko, F. F. Buhayko and P. D. Mysnyk (eds.),



Ermolaev concludes that the theory of socialist realism differs from other literary theories as it is a product of a distinct political, social, and economic period of Soviet history, the period of Stalin's dictatorship.<sup>44</sup> It was primarily created by politicians, not by literary men, and was imposed upon art and its creators by the Communist Party. Party policy continues to occupy the highest position in the scale of values, followed by Marxist philosophy, and lastly, the traditional demands of imaginative literature.<sup>45</sup> Because of the dominant role the State plays in determining the development of Soviet Ukrainian literature, this literature must be regarded as a reflection of the nation's historic process and viewed in terms of it.

#### Socialist Realism

An examination of the literary history of socialist realism has shown that the theory consists of certain basic principles, whose incorporation make a novel "socialist-realist" in nature. Before analyzing the novels Haryachi pochuttya, Praporonostsi, and Pravda i kryvda, an explanation of what these features are will aid in their analysis and interpretation. Socialist realism is not only a method but a philosophy. Its origins lie in the German philosophy of history

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Ukrajins'ka radyans'ka literatura (Kiev, 1963), p. 419.

<sup>44</sup>Ermolaev, Soviet Literary Theories, p. 183.

<sup>45</sup>Ibid., p. 206.



involving a dialectical concept of historical development. The concept of socialist realism--the method of proletarian literature--stems from the Marxist thesis that the dictatorship of the proletariat (a transitional stage from the "bourgeois" class society to the classless Communist society) is a historical necessity. No comprehensive theory of aesthetics was constructed within the Marxist philosophy,<sup>46</sup> and consequently Soviet writers and critics felt free to manoeuvre within the general framework of the principles of historical materialism in their attempt to define proletarian culture.

In the early formative years of proletarian art, according to A. A. Bogdanov, a leading Bolshevik theorist on the nature and function of art, the creative process was the highest and most complex form of labour. Hence, the characteristics and creative methods of proletarian art corresponded to those of proletarian labour. Art had to organize "social experience" in the sphere of cognition as well as that of sensations and aspirations.<sup>47</sup> In the early twenties art was defined as a part of the superstructure over "the 'basic' material segment" of life.<sup>48</sup> Artists were to acquaint themselves with reality, particularly with problems issuing from

<sup>46</sup> Harold Swayze, Political Control of Literature in the USSR, 1947-1959, p. 2. Although the writings of Marx and Engels are primarily concerned with social and ethical problems, certain key concepts of their theory of history have become fundamentals in the socialist theory of art.

<sup>47</sup> Ermolaev, Soviet Literary Theories, p. 11.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., p. 30.



the Revolution and to incorporate this knowledge, this message, in artistic form. Being ideologically committed to the Communist society, proletarian literature featured as its basic traits a purposeful attitude towards the outside world, the apotheosis of labour, and the spirit of collectivism. The collective "we" replaced the individual "I", but, professedly, not to the exclusion of the individual altogether. The individual was thought to be in tune with the collective, to be a reflection of its soul.

Theorists of socialist realism base themselves on the thesis that socialist ideas, because they conquer the mind, can be transformed into emotions. This same idea was expressed by Abram Deborin, one of the foremost Soviet philosophers.<sup>49</sup> Ermolaev concludes that the cultural revolution should affect both the social psyche and social ideology according to Deborin's philosophy. Social ideology is a form of the social psyche which has been "assimilated," "organized," and "systemized" by conscious effort. Elements of social ideology invade the realm of the sub-conscious and become components of the social psyche. The purpose of the cultural revolution was to alter the face of the country by moulding the public mind.<sup>50</sup> The function of literature within the framework of this revolution, therefore, was to aid in effecting a psychological transformation

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<sup>49</sup>A. Deborin, "Novy pokhod protiv marksizma," Letopisi marksizma, No. 1, 1926, p. 35, cited by Ermolaev, Soviet Literary Theories, p. 61.

<sup>50</sup>Ermolaev, Soviet Literary Theories, p. 61.



of the masses that would promote new socialist mentality and behaviour.<sup>51</sup> Perhaps a more appropriate term for describing the method used would be psychological realism.

The axiom taken from Hegel, that the whole can only exist in the particular, is embodied in the theory of socialist realism where the psychology of every single literary personage is purportedly a reflection of the psychology of an entire social class. Essentially, therefore, this demonstrated "in the final analysis the total historical process of social movement and development."<sup>52</sup> An "objective" depiction of reality evolving by historical laws towards socialism was set forth as the most suitable literary method for expressing the essence of dialectical materialism. The duty of writers was to create a dialectical realism capable of depicting life in its evolution and containing within it the seeds of the future. Realism, concerned both with past and present, would disclose more objective truths about social and political facets of life than any other literary current. The crux of Marxist literary investigation was to reveal the point at which social reality and the socially-conditioned writer objectively depicting it are fused into an indivisible whole. The writer, in the Soviet view, thus becomes an active

<sup>51</sup>Ermolaev, Soviet Literary Theories, p. 3.

<sup>52</sup>Fadeev, "Stolbovaya doroga proletarskoy literatury," Oktyabr', No. 11, 1928, p. 171., cited by Ermolaev, Soviet Literary Theories, p. 63.



participant in the process of the Socialist Revolution.<sup>53</sup> At the basis of socialist realism lies the unity of idea and reality.

According to Engels' view, realism implies truth of detail, truth in the reproduction of typical characters under typical circumstances. This concept is another tenet of socialist realism. Typical circumstances were interpreted as the historical essence of an epoch, its class nature and contradictions. Type characters embodying easily recognizable social traits were presented as characteristic representatives of their classes.<sup>54</sup> The ideas, emotions, and actions of a typical character were to be motivated by his class characteristics. Typical circumstances are those against which the given character type develops, or those in which he appears most fully and significantly.

The term "typical" was not, according to the theory, to be used in the ordinary sense. It did not signify a certain statistical average or mean something widespread, frequently repeated, or encountered every day. Typicalness corresponded to the essence of a given socio-historical phenomenon. The writer was to fix his gaze on essences rather than appearances, not on things as they are but on things as they should be. The function of romanticism in socialist realism was to give an idealized picture of the future that Communism was striving to

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<sup>53</sup>Buryak (ed.), Istoriya . . ., p. 28.

<sup>54</sup>Ermolaev, Soviet Literary Theories, p. 153.



effect. Essentially, it was the author's affirmation of his own ideals. So-called "active romanticism" or "revolutionary romanticism" involved the affirmation of the new norms of life, shown in desired living changes. It is tied with realism since it has a similar philosophy of the development of life. Both realism and romanticism express ideas on the nature of the determining forces of society.<sup>55</sup>

Realism was considered to be the closest possible expression of dialectical materialism, however, and was favoured over other currents because its relative simplicity of style made it suitable for propaganda purposes. A faithful and artistic portrayal of life was possible only if the writer viewed reality in the light of the basic aims of the Socialist Revolution. The Soviet writer, whether or not he belongs to the Communist Party, is bound to it in his philosophy, which should be characterized by partiynist', klasovist' and narodnist'.

Partiynist' consists in the writer's expressing the interests of the proletarian class and of the Communist Party. Any activity is always interpreted on an ideological basis, it has a definite "class" motivation. The evolution of partiynist' as a feature of Soviet literature is related to the active role of that literature.<sup>56</sup> Klasovist', the portrayal

<sup>55</sup>H. K. Sydorenko, Osnovy literaturoznavstva (Kiev, 1962), pp. 37-39.

<sup>56</sup>Ibid., p. 26.



of class ideology and the revelation of class contradictions in social developments, is another feature of socialist realism (here, the writer's views have a class character, the struggle of the classes is depicted). Soviet theorists consider partiynist' a higher rung of klasovist'.<sup>57</sup> If a writer is bound to the people, then he is also bound to the Party and the converse is true, too. Narodnist', another tenet of socialist realism, involves the illustration of the thoughts and ideals of the national masses that make a work national in character. This feature is concerned with the relationship of the people to life. Narodnist' is comprised of a number of aspects, but two in particular: a concern for the most important problems of current life, and an attempt to develop in works of art the psychological truth of national characters, types, customs, language, and atmosphere.<sup>58</sup>

The central problem of contemporary Soviet literature was the creation of a complex, living man--the perfect "socialist" man--with an appropriate psychology, lofty emotions, and praiseworthy behaviour. Writers had to breed a man--destined to be the ideal hero of proletarian literature--whose purpose was to set an example for the reader by his actions, thoughts, and emotions. He was not simply to be good and heroic, but the most ideal of all ideals, a man differing from the traditional positive hero of classical

<sup>57</sup>P. K. Volyns'ky, Osnovy teoriyi literatury (Kiev, 1962), p. 36.

<sup>58</sup>Anatoliy Moroz, Pro narodnist' u literaturi (Kiev, 1958), p. 55.



literature in his lack of sense of tragedy and in his ability to realize his dreams, aspirations, and goals. The typical hero of socialist realism is the humanist-fighter whose basic qualities are ideological conviction (the clarity and directness with which he perceives and seeks to promote the aims of communism), straight-forwardness, unpretentiousness, humanism, courage, intelligence, will-power, wisdom, and self-sacrifice.

Another example of narodnist' in literature consists in the work theme. Writers dealt with the question of labour as the patriotic responsibility of the Soviet citizen. The theme of peaceful, creative toil, one of the most important themes of post-war literature, involved the socialist or class-consciousness of the worker in regard to his work, and the significance of the collective in the growth of every individual. This theme was often approached by first introducing the idea of the spiritual beauty of man at work.

Parallelling the theme of work and closely identified with it is the theme of land as the embodiment of the nation. Still more important, however, with regard to Soviet Ukrainian literature is the fact that the land has been a traditional subject in Ukrainian literature.

Careful depiction of national customs and the use of language expressions and various idioms were manifestations of narodnist' in literature. Narodnist' also consisted in narrative descriptions of native landscapes, and monologues of the hero addressed to nature in which he expresses his enchantment with the beauty of his native land. Writers generalized,



describing the life of nature and the life of man in both physical and metaphysical terms. Often their language had a symbolic meaning.

Through the exploitation of the war theme narodnist' was successfully introduced into literary works. The physical and moral superiority, complete self-sufficiency, pride in Soviet accomplishments, uniqueness of the Soviet order-- all this constitutes the complete set of emotions and attitudes finding expression in the extreme nationalism which has become a part of the official ideology. It was mandatory, however, for the novelist to show that Soviet patriotism stemmed from communist convictions.

Socialist realism originated as a set of Party-postulated demands which aimed at transforming literature into an effective tool for the practical realization of Marxist doctrine and, as such, is a collection of political prescriptions rather than a literary phenomenon. The purpose of Soviet literature is different from that of Western literature.

Socialist realism, as the basic method of Soviet imaginative literature and literary criticism, demands from the artist a truthful, historically concrete depiction of reality in its revolutionary development. At the same time this truthfulness and historical concreteness of the artistic depiction of reality must be combined with the task of the ideological moulding and education of the working people in the spirit of socialism.<sup>59</sup>

According to the Marxist aesthetic conception, art must serve

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<sup>59</sup>"Ustav Soyuza sovetskikh pisateley," Pravda and Literaturnaya gazeta, May 6, 1934.



as an instrument in the class struggle. Since the proletariat is the revolutionary and dominant class and the Communist Party is regarded as the advance guard of the proletariat, the Party must not only define the purpose of literature but actually direct all Soviet art. It is only with an understanding of the Soviet literary approach that one can most objectively, justly, and sympathetically deal with and interpret Soviet literary works.

The social role of Soviet Ukrainian literature results from a combination of Marxist dialectics, which lies at the basis of socialist realism, and political events, which determines the practice and fluctuations of that method. The history of Soviet Ukrainian literature can be divided into several distinct periods. The periods after 1934 are characterized either by a tightening of Party cultural policy in its demands for more orthodox works in Soviet literature or by a loosening of that policy and encouraging the production of more aesthetic works. The inclusion of communist ideology did not necessarily assure artistic mastery nor vice versa. Examination of the various periods of socialist realism indicates a tendency for one or the other element to prevail. Never have both existed simultaneously to the satisfaction of the Soviet critic. One is, therefore, led to ask why both features have not been successfully combined to form a good novel of socialist realism. Analysis of three typical Soviet Ukrainian novels in the following chapters will show the



interaction of these two elements and how the writers, Yakiv Bash, Oles Honchar, and Mykhaylo Stelmakh, have attempted to fuse these two components, at the same time indispensable yet of questionable compatibility, which are essential for a socialist-realist novel.



## CHAPTER II

### YAKIV BASH

#### Biography

Yakiv Bash (literary pseudonym of Yakiv Vysylovych Bashmak) was born August 8, 1908, in the village of Melove in the province of Kherson.<sup>1</sup> The son of a poor farmer, he was unable to complete his schooling. At the beginning of 1920 the Soviet government created a special commission for the electrification of the country. The plan, HOELRO (State Commission for the Electrification of Russia), envisaged the construction of ten hydro-electric power plants, one of which was the Dniprostan (Dnieper Hydro-Electric Station). At the time of its conception--1928--this power plant was intended to be the biggest in the world; while it was being built it served as the theme for numerous stories and novels.<sup>2</sup> Bash actually participated in the entire construction of the Dniprostan. In 1931 he became a workers'

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<sup>1</sup>The principal sources for the biography of Bash are: A. D'yachenko, "Yakov Bash," Literaturnye portrety (Kiev, 1960), II, 441-45; Yakiv Bash, Haryachi pochuttya; Profesor Buyko (Kiev, 1955), pp. 463-77; and B. S. Buryak (ed.), Istoriya ukrayins'koyi radyans'koyi literatury, pp. 345, 392 and 452-53.

<sup>2</sup>Other novelists who took the construction of the Dniprostan as their theme were: V. Kuz'mych, Turbiny (1932), S. Sklyarenko, Burun (1932), and H. Kotsyuba, Novi bereshy (1933-1937).



correspondent for the journal Proletar Dniprobinda (Proletarian of the Dniprobinda), and in the same year the first of his short stories, Krytsya (Steel), was published.

The biography of Bash is typical of those of the Bolshevik intelligentsia of the thirties. He was an active member of the Komsomol (Communist Youth League) and held an official post in the Communist Party in 1931. In 1932 another of his works, Doba horyt' (The Epoch is Burning), appeared in print. Generally, his short stories written in the late twenties and early thirties were based on the construction of the Dniprostan and on the lives of its workers. In 1933 the collection of sketches Dni nastupu (Days of Advance), again on this theme, served as the basis for his later novel, Haryachi pochuttya (Passionate Feelings).

As the recipient of a special scholarship awarded in the name of the Dniprostan, Bash began advanced study at Kharkiv University in 1932 and later continued his work in the Faculty of Philology at the University of Kiev. There, from 1937 to 1941, he was a Candidate of Philological Sciences in the field of literature. His first novel Syla (Strength) appeared in 1934 and his second, Na berehakh Slavuty (On the Banks of the Dnieper), in 1940. The war interrupted his literary activities: Bash fought in a Ukrainian partisan division and was awarded two orders of the first rank for his service.

The first post-war work of Bash was the novel Profesor Buyko, published in 1945. Its theme, based on Bash's activities in the Soviet underground movement, concerns a partisan



doctor, Professor Petro Mykhaylovych Buyko, who led a group of underground fighters against the occupying Germans. In concrete and vividly descriptive terms the author depicts not only a singular war hero but the Soviet people as a whole, who grow in stature as they range about territory occupied by the enemy. In 1949 this novel was made into a play.

After the war Bash began reworking his previous novel, Na berehakh Slavuty, and the results appeared in 1947 as Haryachi pochuttya. This novel concerns the construction of the Dniprostan and the lives of a number of people who participated in this great historical event. The hero of the novel is the toiling creative collective consisting of workers, technicians, Party leaders, representatives of the old intelligentsia, the youth, and people of high executive positions as well as those of lesser state but of equal importance. With this novel Bash strove to relate details of the actual construction and, more important, he attempted to present artistically an atmosphere of human creativity conducive to great feats of labour. The characters are fictitious except for brief occasional references to a number of Soviet leaders--Stalin, Kalinin and Molotov. The events described involve to an extent the personal experiences of Bash during the period of the construction.

In another drama, Dniprovi zori (Stars of the Dnieper River), appearing in 1953, Bash portrays the self-sacrificing work of the Soviet people in rebuilding the war-ravaged hydroelectric power plant. In this "heroic" drama, written in a



realistic style, Bash focusses his attention on the "noble" features that characterize the Soviet people. His most recent work, the novel Nadiya, was published in 1959. Against the background of a factory on the Dnieper River, the Zaporizhstal, during the first months of the war, the writer unfolds a picture of the life and work of the factory labourers and attempts to construct sharp, difficult situations in which heroes and heroines exhibit their spiritual qualities, their motivations, and their desires. The important feature here is the description of the patriotism and heroism of the Soviet peoples, their moral and physical strength and the inevitability of their victory over the German invaders.

#### Haryachi pochuttya

Haryachi pochuttya is the story of the spiritual growth of a group of individuals, a collective bound together by a common aim--the building of the Dniprostan. The progress of the construction parallels the growth of the heroes,<sup>3</sup> purportedly to strengthen the structure of the work, its composition, theme, the motifs that thread it together. Bash attempted to depict life in its continuous development, to reveal the shoots or seeds of the future, in accordance with the theory of socialist realism.<sup>4</sup> Whether or not he was successful

<sup>3</sup>All positive characters are considered heroes in a novel of socialist realism. Abram Tertz [pseud.], On Socialist Realism (New York, 1960), p. 50.

<sup>4</sup>The formula to which Soviet writers are confined was



in this task will be determined by close examination of the work.

The novel consists of six parts and an epilogue. In the first part the reader is introduced to the main hero, Hontar, a young iron-monger, and other workers arriving at the site of the future dam. The first obstacle, the cataracts of the Dnieper River, is encountered and conquered, and becomes a motif throughout the novel symbolizing the life that Hontar and the people, whom he typifies, are entering. On the Dniprostan Hontar fails to win the confidence of the chief engineer, Bobrytsky; subsequently, he is "put to the test" and, although he fails in his first attempt, quickly succeeds in tempering some chisels by a kind of miraculous insight. A third obstacle confronts the collective when a rocky cliff, Bohatyr, cannot be blown up. The first step in the dam's construction is further complicated by the protests of an old intelligent who feels that the site is sacred since it was once inhabited by Cossacks of the Zaporozhian Sitch. Such an argument meets with the statement that now only wild rapids exist there, and the work continues unabated.

In the second part Hontar is promoted to the executive position of assistant to Bobrytsky. The foundation, which is to be laid before the onset of winter, is to contain five

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clearly enunciated by A. A. Zhdanov in Literaturnaya gazeta, September 21, 1946, pp. 2-3. It is discussed in a rather one-sided way by M. Hlobenko, "The Official History of Soviet Ukrainian Literature," Ukrainian Review (Munich), No. 5, 1957, p. 19.



hundred thousand cubic metres of cement, in itself a feat of unique proportions. The speed, efficiency and intelligence of the body of workers, like a front forging ahead in unison, are of an ideal nature. At a Party meeting Nabatov, head of the construction, holds the view that Moscow and Leningrad factories can supply them with the necessary turbines. He is opposed by Znamensky, the local Party leader, who believes that the first turbines must be supplied by Americans since the latter have had more experience in the building of hydro-electric power plants. The workers succeed in blowing up the cliff, and harbours are prepared for the arrival of the turbines from America. Meanwhile, Hontar becomes organizer of technical courses to qualify young workers as technicians and to lessen their dependence on American assistance.

A secondary subject initially subordinate to the primary theme--the building of the dam--emerges and gradually predominates. This concerns Hontar's personal life, a tragic result of the Civil War. On the assumption that his first wife died during his service in the war, he had married a second time. Oksana, Hontar's second wife, arrives unexpectedly on the construction site, but she is joyfully greeted by him. Their relationship, however, is marred by doubts in Oksana's mind concerning Hontar's life with his first wife, Maria.

At an early stage in the construction a mighty storm of unequalled intensity breaks out and the collective is again put to a severe test. The author relates the event by showing



how various workers meet the challenge of saving the foundation of the dam; here he reveals the significance of the dam to these workers, and demonstrates how people, in victorious conquest, are transformed into persons of a higher moral stature. During the storm Hontar is left in command, and at a crucial moment saves a pump whose loss might have meant the dam's complete destruction.

The third part begins with the arrival of Mister Fred, a representative of the American firm supplying the turbines for the Dniprostan, and of Hontar's former wife, Maria, now remarried to an electrical engineer. This unusual and complex situation is idealistically resolved by the new relationship of Hontar and Maria, formerly one of deep love between man and woman; now it is merely a relationship on a Platonic level. This complex situation has a positive effect on the marriages of Hontar and Oksana and of Maria and her husband, Krucha.

The fourth part tells of a competition between two brigades of workers, one American and one Soviet, in assembling the electrical system of the hydro-electric plant. The Americans, being more experienced, produce more per day than does the Soviet brigade. But the determination, swiftness and inventiveness of Pavlusha, leader of the Soviet brigade, results in his brigade's surpassing the American quota and thus triumphing over the Americans. Meanwhile, the newly discovered confidence between Oksana and Hontar is short-lived; the apparently trusting and stable relationship comes to an



end, since false rumors of the "ill-doer" Lolya induce Oksana to leave her husband and child.

In the fifth part only a few days remain before the First of May, the day the dam is to be opened. But an unforeseen event, the rising Dnieper waters, threatens the turbines. Professor Byelyayev, sent to the site for the purpose of testing the turbines, believes that the risk is too great and opposes putting the turbines into operation on the planned date. Although he is approached first by Krucha and then by Bobrytsky, who try to convince him of the importance of the dam opening on the First, he stands firm in his decision. Only when Hontar speaks to him does he alter his decision. This particular episode could be considered the climax of the novel.

The sixth part, which appears anti-climactic, describes the unmasking of the villains, Maria's saving Hontar's life, and the official opening of the Dniprostan by Soviet government officials (a congratulatory message is received from Stalin himself!). The story concludes with an epilogue. Hontar leaves the Dniprostan site for new shores involving new challenges and victories. He leaves behind both Maria and Oksana who stand arm-in-arm waving farewell.

Haryachi pochuttya is typical of the Soviet "production" novel that chronicles an historical event during the First Five-Year Plan. It comprises a series of tasks and obstacles, always overcome by the Soviet people, with communist ideology imbuing each episode. The theme of harmonious creative



work is a recurring motif in the description of each event. The question of labour is put forth as a patriotic responsibility of the Soviet citizen. Bash deals with the socialist position of the individual with regard to his work; this involves the meaning of the collective for the growth of every individual.

Petro Hontar, hero of labour, arrives on the Dnipro-  
stan facing a new and unknown life, full of disturbing and unforeseen obstacles. He begins his work as a simple blacksmith and experiences failure in his first tasks. As a seeker and an innovator, he suddenly has a flash of insight through which the problem of tempering the chisels--the first difficulty--is overcome. This insight comes about when he overhears a conversation about the significance of the hydroelectric power plant. It is this feeling of responsibility that spurs him onward to achievement. Perseverance, hard work, unbounded energy, attentive and sincere concern for people win him a position of respect in the collective.

It is questionable, however, whether Hontar convinces the reader of his humanistic qualities. For example, in pursuing an incident that is ostensibly intended to show Hontar's concern for people, one discovers that the real purpose of the particular episode is to serve the theme of work rather than the characterization of Hontar. A secondary character, Averin, driven to drink as the result of an unhappy marriage, is taken under the wing of Hontar who,



caring for him like a child, hopes to redeem him. No reason is given why Hontar assumes this responsibility. In fact, there is no description at all of the ensuing relationship which one expects! Later in the novel Averin reverts to his old habits, becomes drunk, and is sent away. Still, the event, embodying no real question or significance, stands. Only in the end, when a skindiver is needed to retrieve a stray log that is threatening the mechanism of the turbine, does Averin enter the picture again. Emerging from nowhere, Averin feels that the dangerous task will give him the opportunity of expressing his gratitude to Hontar. In examining this episode which is typical of most of the incidents in the novel, it becomes evident that its purpose is not really to show Hontar's humanistic side; it is unconvincing since it is neither preceded by any motivation nor succeeded by a development of the relationship. The incident serves merely as part of the action of the novel rather than the development of a character.

A "typical" character as portrayed by Soviet writers is not a photostatic copy of reality, but a generalized recreation of people--collectivist in thought and deed--representing a definite type of human character, a definite social attitude towards work.<sup>5</sup> The positive hero represents the most ideal of all ideals, having few if any faults. As these faults are neither serious nor credible, they therefore cannot be considered true weaknesses. Their ultimate purpose in the

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<sup>5</sup>H. A. V'yazovs'ky, Literaturno-khudozhiy typ i yoho prototypy (Kiev, 1962), p. 7.



characters is either to preserve a certain likeness to real people in their portrayal or merely to provide something for the character to overcome as he grows spiritually in stature. In the case of Hontar, his positive features include intelligence, courage, ideological conviction, will-power, patriotism, self-sacrifice, and respect for women. It is difficult to point out any defect in his character. He emerges as an unusual master of his trade and an effective organizer of the masses. Day by day he accumulates valuable experience, and his importance increases. He becomes an authority among the builders. Because of the absence of character defects, no real development in his character takes place or is brought about by collective activity.

No conflict exists within the personality of the Soviet type of character. The contradiction between the personal life of the hero and his duty to the Communist cause is softened as much as possible.<sup>6</sup> The expression of love is wholly subservient to the fulfillment of social tasks. To illustrate this, let us look at the underlying theme of the novel, the triangle<sup>7</sup> of Hontar and his two wives. Hontar, encountering the two women on the building site, attempts, by entering into a new Platonic relationship with his first wife Maria, to reconcile himself to his tragic past with her,

<sup>6</sup>A. M. Van Der Eng-liedmeier, Soviet Literary Characters (The Hague, 1959), p. 129.

<sup>7</sup>What one might call the theme of the "eternal Triangle" emerged during the post-war years. Ibid., p. 136.



to his separation from her before they had been able to actualize their great love. This action deepens his love for Oksana, his second wife, and she, in turn, comes to know Hontar better. But the trivial gossip of Lolya, Oksana's friend, undermines this newly-established confidence, and Oksana leaves her husband. The reader is made aware of the anguish that both lovers suffer, but the lovers make no effort to return to one another. Oksana finds new fulfillment in collective work and achieves fame and recognition as an organizer among the women labourers of the Dniprelstan. She finds herself in the socialistic reality only after sacrificing love and family life to the social task before her.

Generally, in Soviet literature of this time the hero is supported by a Party official, an uncomplicated person whose personal desires appear to coincide completely with his social obligations.<sup>8</sup> In Haryachi pochuttya, with the exception of Hontar, the character most favourably described is Znamensky, the District Party Secretary and a leader of the workers' collective. He perceives in Hontar an unusual potential for leading the people and building the communist society. It is he who instils in Hontar the feelings of responsibility towards the nation. Znamensky becomes Hontar's "spiritual guide"; he educates by means of example, directly

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<sup>8</sup>Ibid., p. 130.



or indirectly. He is the embodiment of the New Man.

The role that the Communist Party plays in the lives of the characters is large. Many meetings take place where individuals voice their passionate feelings with respect to the construction. The author attempts to show that the construction of the Dniprostan was due to the guidance given to the workers' collective by the Communist Party. Throughout the novel the Party's power and strength is always present. Facing up to every crisis is the Communist Znamensky, a man indirectly responsible for the victories of the collective. Znamensky is essentially a symbol of the Communist Party. One of his main tasks in the story is to place Hontar in various situations affording opportunities to prove himself and to grow in moral stature. The question arises whether he actually does prove himself. My contention is that he does not, a fact that only adds to the unconvincing nature of his characterization.

Just three days before the First of May, floods and high waters make the opening of the dam risky. The final decision rests with Professor Byelyayev, who cannot be swayed by the political, economic, and moral arguments presented by Krucha and Bobrytsky. The fate of the dam depends solely upon Hontar, representing Znamensky who is absent at this time. He goes before a specially called meeting, listens attentively, quietly rises, and speaks. What he actually says is unknown to the reader. Nabatov replies to Hontar's speech. The decision is changed. This moment is Hontar's most severe



challenge. How he overcomes the situation, how he achieves victory, in what ways is he superior to the others--this is not shown. How is it possible, therefore, to believe that he is capable of overcoming these difficulties? The reader is curious to know what arguments there are other than those of a political, economic, and moral nature for opening a dam on the originally planned date, for he truly would be a hero who could put forth more persuasive arguments. This omission and others similar to it make the characterization of Hontar unconvincing and hollow.

Heroism is not confined to male workers: females also make their mark in the construction of a socialist society. The emancipation of woman is considered to be part of the socialist programme.<sup>9</sup> The status of woman in society depends upon the economic relationships affecting her or involving her in the role of production. Wifehood and motherhood are of secondary importance relative to this basic function.<sup>10</sup> There are two essential features in the Marxian programme concerning the question of women: her liberation from the bonds of the family, and her employment in socially productive work.<sup>11</sup>

Halya, one of the minor characters in the novel, is no less heroic than the male characters. She is a young, innocent,

<sup>9</sup> Louise E. Luke, "Marxian Woman: Soviet Variants," Through the Glass of Soviet Literature, ed. with an introduction by Ernest J. Simmons (New York, 1953), p. 29.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., p. 45.



enthusiastic girl who has foregone the comforts of home in order to work on this great project. Her heroism sets her apart from ordinary human beings. She represents the ideal Soviet citizen. During a storm that threatens the foundation of the dam, she is not permitted to work on one of its particularly dangerous sections. Because she cannot satisfy her strong sense of obligation to the collective and to her country, deep feelings of distress overtake her. Craftily she disguises herself as a male worker and joins the brigade in saving the dam. Her speed, skill, and stamina attract the attention of others. Not only does she work as well as a man, but as well as the best of men! This demonstration effectively erases the distinction between man and woman in work.

The old intelligentsia or simply the old generation--people formed before the October Revolution--are also characterized. Generally, Bash portrays them as people lacking faith in the communist cause. Vovnyha, an experienced sailor, does not believe in the possibility of subjugating the stormy rapids of the Dnieper River; but as the construction proceeds and nears completion his faith in Communism grows. Leaders of the old generation are difficult to work with; they are cautious, they do not understand the energy of the collective youth which has more faith in them than they have in themselves. In the end, however, they light up with the same enthusiasm under the influence of the Komsomol youth.

Although Haryachi pochuttya concerns an event that took place in the early thirties, the novel itself was written



in 1947 and must be viewed in terms of the literary developments of that latter period. "Post-war literature," as Avraham Yarmolinsky has observed, "seemed to have as its purpose the preparation of the people for the next round in the fight against fascism, alias capitalism."<sup>12</sup> Party spokesmen flatly warned writers against open dissemination of "reactionary" ideas that would support the historically doomed bourgeoisie. The reader was to be educated in the spirit of Communism and to be inspired to combat the private ownership mentality of capitalism. Toward the end of the twenties there was a shortage of technicians for the Five-Year Plan and the Soviet Government was forced to recruit them from abroad. On the construction site of the Dniprostan were several American engineers and technicians, especially trained in the installation of turbines. In the novel these specialists represent the capitalist world. They are shown to be essentially unimaginative time-servers who follow instructions explicitly, protest about insignificant things, and, generally, are not of the calibre of Soviet citizens. Throughout the novel Bash cites instances of American failures in the construction of their hydro-electric power plants.

Perhaps a stronger motif than that of anti-Americanism is the role the collective plays in the life of each Soviet citizen. Each character is basically an individual striving for the victory of the collective, here the collectivist or

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<sup>12</sup> Literature Under Communism, p. 11.



socialist state. One needs to understand the socialist essence of this literary type.<sup>13</sup> By portraying Hontar's development from his days as a simple iron-monger to the point where he becomes a leader of the masses, Bash connects two extremes of social position into a whole and thereby brings about a narrowing of class distinction in his attempt to artistically create a classless society.

The builders are alike not only in the idealized characteristics they possess, characteristics basic to all Soviet individuals, but also in the singularity of their ideological conviction. Their common purpose is to reconstruct the country. Tasks that the characters undertake are always presented as indispensable steps toward the achievement of this purpose, either in the development of their personalities or simply in the material development of the nation. In Haryachi pochuttya all participate in the construction--men, women, even small children; the latter, being unable to contribute physically to this great historical event, express their desire to be part of it.

And the child, trailing after his mother, kept asking: "Mother! I also want to splash water out of the foundation. . . ."<sup>14</sup>

Not only the immediate community, however, is involved, but indeed the entire country is deeply concerned about the progress of the dam.

<sup>13</sup>See V'yazovs'ky, Literaturno-khudozniy typ . . ., p. 8.

<sup>14</sup>Bash, Haryachi pochuttya . . ., p. 112.



Hontar nodded his head. At this very moment as never before the whole nation was attentively watching the [progress of the] construction. Every day all the central newspapers abounded with news items about the mounting of the turbines.<sup>15</sup>

No one stands apart. All are caught up by the spirit that moves the collective to fulfill its goal. Work is the binding force of the collective, and the goal--the construction of the Dniprostan--is the catalyst that causes the transformation of the Soviet citizen.

The obstacles are trivial when set against the ideal collective. Consequently, the novel lacks any real conflict. The most exciting episode occurs in the second chapter. Floods threaten the foundation of the dam. Even in this case, where nature is the obstacle, Bash "plays down" the setback in the progress of the Dniprostan, and one never senses any kind of defeat or tragedy. In effect, the lack of conflict makes the series of disconnected events lifeless, lacking in significance and suspense. This renders the novel less effective and reduces the whole to a kind of flatness. Although not difficult to determine, the climax does not really serve as the culminating point of events or issues. The novel is reduced to a prosaic chronicling of episodes involving Hontar and the building of the power plant.

Bash's style is devoid of inventiveness and imagination. His writing, stripped of ornamental metaphors and other poetic devices, is clear, concrete and realistic, lacking in depth

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid., p. 210.



beyond surface perception. On occasion he attempts to break away from this straightforward, monotonous manner by describing the Dnieper waters which serve to reflect the action of the novel. These descriptions, however, are undeveloped and rather primitive. They are only a superficial device that fails to engage the reader's interest. Even the inclusion of folklorist and idiomatic terms fail to give emotional depth to the novel.

Depiction of the positive role of the Party and Party official, and of the collective in people's lives makes the novel methodologically one of socialist realism. Bash, as a Soviet writer, fulfills the task of a Marxist-Leninist by interpreting the past as a struggle for, and movement towards, progress. He attempts to show how the Soviet people, as a collective, create history, how socialist aspirations elevate them and encourage them to perform heroic deeds. The communist ideology claims that history makes heroes--as in the case of Hontar who realizes his full potential in building the hydroelectric plant--not heroes history. The nation in developing itself moves history forward by creating the New Man. Bash does not convince his reader of the truthfulness of this social phenomenon. The reader acquires no insight into how communist teachings effect the transformation of men into the ideal Soviet type.

In conclusion, Haryachi pochuttya closely adheres to the requirements made by Soviet critics of the Zhdanov period.



These demands, however, are superficially executed and the novel is reduced to a work of ineffectual propaganda. On this account it fails to be a good novel of socialist realism.



## CHAPTER III

### OLES HONCHAR

#### Biography

Oles Honchar belongs to the younger generation of writers that appeared in full form in post-war Soviet Ukrainian literature. He was born April 3, 1918, into a peasant family of the village of Sukhe, in the district of Kobylyaky in the province of Poltava.<sup>1</sup> After obtaining a secondary education and working for a time for the district newspaper, he entered Kharkiv School of Journalism, studied for three years, and later worked for the Kharkiv Komsomol paper. In 1938, he continued his education in the Faculty of Philology at Kharkiv State University. Shortly afterward, the first of his literary works--verses and short stories--began to appear in various journals and periodicals. The short story Orlya (The Eaglet), on the theme of the nation's defense, was regarded as his best work during 1940. Other works at this time included Ivan

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<sup>1</sup>His full name is Oleksandr Terentiyovych Honchar. The main sources used for the biography and works of Honchar are: M. Shamota, "Oles' Honchar," in Oles' Honchar, Tvory (Kiev, 1954), I, v; O. K. Babyshkin, "Tvorchist' Olesya Honchara," Radyans'ke literaturoznavstvo, No. 11 (1949), pp. 14-19; Ukrayins'ka radyans'ka entsyklopediya (Kiev, 1963), III, 360-61; Oleh Kylymnyk (ed.), Pys'mennyky radyans'koyi Ukrayiny (Kiev, 1960), p. 117; Kylymnyk, Oles' Honchar, Literaturny portret (Kiev, 1959), passim.



Mostovy, Tsilyushcha voda (Medicinal Waters), and Chereshni tsvitut' (The Cherry Trees are Blooming). Generally these works, revealing a distinctly romantic element, tell about the people Honchar actually saw and knew.

The war interrupted both his studies and his budding literary career; in 1941 Honchar volunteered for active war service. Starting as a soldier in the ranks he later commanded a mine-throwing battalion on the Second Ukrainian Front. His personal involvement in and reflections on the war became an abundant source of material for his post-war works. At the end of 1945, Honchar was demobilized and entered Dnipropetrovsk State University where he completed his studies the following year. As a candidate at the Institute of Ukrainian Literature he continued writing short stories and having his verses published.

The first part of the trilogy Praporonostsi (The Standard-Bearers) was completed during the summer of 1946, while the second part was completed and published in 1947. Both parts--Al'py (The Alps) and Holuby Dunay (The Blue Danube)--were awarded Stalin Prizes in the year of their appearance. A second novel, Zemlya hude (The Land Rumbles), was published in the same year, and, in 1948, the third part of Praporonostsi, Zlata Praha (Golden Prague), appeared and was awarded a Stalin Prize of the second rank. Since then Honchar's literary output has been prolific. Some of his major works are Mykyta Bratus' (1950), Shchob svityvsya vohnyk (That the Light



Might Shine) (1954), Tavriya (1957), Partyzans'ka iskra (The Partisan Spark), (1956), and Lyudyna i zbroya (Man and Arms) (1960).

At present Honchar is a Deputy to the Supreme Soviet of the Ukrainian Republic and, since 1959, has been Head of the Union of Soviet Writers of Ukraine and simultaneously Secretary of the Union of Soviet Writers of the U.S.S.R. He has been a member of the Communist Party since 1946 and, for his service in the development of literature, Honchar was awarded the Order of Lenin in 1960.

Before considering Honchar's major work, Praporonostsi, a brief general examination of the themes of his other important works should be of some interest and value to the reader. Zemlya hude (The Land Rumbles) deals with the struggle of the Soviet underground movement against the Germans during their occupation of Soviet territory. In the novel the heroine Lyalya Ubyvovk, a young woman of moral and spiritual beauty, in the "purity" of her love for the Fatherland, gives up her life. With this plot the author wants to stress the immortality of her spiritual growth, influenced and nurtured by the socialist way of life.

Honchar's next significant work was Mykyta Bratus' (1951), a novel dealing with the new communist approach to work. Mykyta Bratus, as sketched by the author, is a man of inexhaustible creative energy who yearns for a new, more beautiful life. In his desire to transform the southern part of Soviet Ukraine



into an orchard, he reveals the idealistic aspect of his personality, which, in Honchar's view, characterizes the communal way of life. Opposing forces, severely criticized by Honchar, include "survivals" of the Old World that have remained within the consciousness of the people, and American imperialism.

The "richness of the soul" of the Soviet people is again the central theme of Honchar's novel Shchob svityvsya vohnyk. This work has Soviet youth as its hero, and its theme is the nobility of their impulses, the morality of their souls. At the same time, Honchar criticizes the spiritually sterile young person whom one still encounters here and there in life.

In the novels Tavriya and Perekop, both closely related in theme, Honchar, searching for new subject matter, refers to the social upheaval in Ukraine during the revolutionary events of 1917-1920. The setting is southern Ukraine on the eve of the First World War. For the first time Honchar does not rely on his personal experiences, but attempts to create types of individuals and to fabricate problems he imagined might be true. His theme, the political and spiritual preparation of the exploited workers for the violent social revolution, puts before the reader two distinct ways of life--capitalism and socialism. In Tavriya Honchar traces the development of a worker who, from a poor simple farmer, becomes a leading member of a collective farm. In direct contrast to the ideal proletarian is the exploiter, a future member of the Petlyura movement. The novel is rich in character sketches and



is romantic in style. Perekop may be considered a continuation of Tavriya. Consisting of three parts, this novel is tightly bound together by the singularity of its theme--the class struggle. The action takes place in Ukraine during the time of the Civil War. Honchar, in a poetic and romantic manner, regards the Civil War as a grim but heroic event. A series of historic figures, some appearing in Tavriya, are shown as a unit moving through battles, encountering and overcoming obstacles, discovering their own strength, and evolving their collective character.

From this brief look at Honchar's works one finds that his plots and themes are based upon actual historical fact. His approach is that of a romanticist when he creates the New Man, the national hero, imbued with only morally and spiritually ideal qualities. Of more significance is the fact that his heroes are always shown engaged in their socialistic undertakings. The portrayal of their growth as Soviet citizens is the primary aim of Honchar and it indicates his close adherence to the Party line on literature.

#### Praporonostsi

Praporonostsi, Honchar's foremost work, is one of the major Soviet Ukrainian novels. It is comprised of three parts: Al'py, Holuby Dunay, and Zlata Praha. Each part may stand alone or be considered part of a whole. The trilogy is based on Honchar's actual experiences on the Second Ukrainian Front at the time of the German retreat from Ukraine. A short quotation



from the renowned Kievan-Rus landmark, Slovo o polku Ihorevim (The Song of Ihor's Campaign), introduces each part and sets the tone of the novel--that of war and victory. Each part culminates with a new feat of victory of the Soviet Army<sup>2</sup> in its campaign to "liberate" foreign countries from German occupation. Throughout the three parts the characters are shown in evolution as they work to achieve victory over the conquerors.

The first part opens as Chernysh, a Komsomol member from the Don region, meets Kozakov, an old war veteran on the Ukrainian-Rumanian border. Both men are on their way to join a regiment on the Second Ukrainian Front. On their journey, they encounter the letter "L" written on sign posts, walls, and other places, symbolizing the guiding Leninist ideology which accompanies the soldiers through their war exploits and which becomes a motif linking together all three sections of the trilogy. Joining Samiyev's regiment, the young and inexperienced Chernysh begins a new life, the life of a Soviet soldier. Here he meets his superior officers: Major Vorontsov, hero of the decisive Battle of Stalingrad, and Bryansky, the commander of the platoon. Chernysh then makes the acquaintance of Sahayda, whose bitter past has left its mark upon him; Hay, an innocent idealistic lad whose love of life is an inspiration to those around him; Roman and Denys Blazhenko, related not only by blood, but also by spirit; Khoma Khayetsky, the

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<sup>2</sup>Shamota, "Oles' Honchar," p. xii.



humorous and earthy Ukrainian whose simple and straightforward manner is a source of joy to the others; and the young singer Makoveychyk who, desirous of serving his country, lies about his age in order to be part of this historic mission.

The regiment of Samiyev joins the Third Ukrainian Front, surrounds Rumanian and German divisions and forces them to surrender. The battalion under the command of Bryansky advances into the Transylvanian Alps with the aim of seizing strategic highways and passes. In a series of episodes Honchar reveals the nature of non-socialist peoples. He contrasts the Rumanians, enlightened of "Soviet" humanism, and their song of welcome to the Soviet Army, the "Internationale," with the Germans and their inhuman treatment of their own soldiers. Bryansky is killed in battle. The tragedy of his death serves to draw the soldiers closer to one another in feelings of brotherhood. Another decisive moment occurs when the platoon is encircled in a country manor. In this episode each soldier encounters and overcomes obstacles, thereby distinguishing himself in battle and raising himself in moral stature. Here the theme is the steadfast loyalty of the Soviet soldier who fights to the death for his country.

The second part of the trilogy contains a sub-plot underlying the main one on the activities in Hungary involving Samiyev's regiment and the Germans. The girl friend of Bryansky, Shura Yasnohorska, who has been separated from him for three years, has finally learned of his whereabouts, and



manages to join Samiyev's regiment as a nurse. The reader is introduced to yet another Soviet hero, Vasya, who informs Shura of Bryansky's death. The impact that Bryansky made upon the platoon was so strong and profound that Shura feels his presence, if not in body, then in spirit. The soldiers idolize Shura whose personal qualities are outstanding. Their respect and devotion springs from the fact that Shura is an embodiment of Bryansky's ideals, a projection of Bryansky himself.

In the meantime Soviet divisions have surrounded Budapest. Although the Hungarian Parliament yields to the Red Army, a long and bloody battle ensues. Again, contained in this larger episode of the novel is a series of smaller ones in which the individual soldiers reveal their humane and superior qualities in warfare. Storming into the Parliament, the character Khoma appears as the major hero; he takes his place as a courageous and just leader. Here Honchar observes that people formed by the capitalist world are inferior in character and emphasizes the moral superiority and rectitude of Soviet citizens.

During this period a latent love relationship has emerged between Shura and Chernysh, but neither gives way to an expression of their romantic feeling for each other. They do not permit their relationship to develop beyond a Platonic level. Loyalty and devotion to the Fatherland and to the memory of Bryansky remain foremost in their minds.

In the third part of the novel the personal feelings



of Shura and Chernysh slowly emerge for all to see and it becomes quite evident that they deeply love one other. Still Shura hesitates even to consider the question of love before her duty to her country has been fulfilled. Meanwhile, Samiyev's regiment advances through the Carpathian Mountains into occupied Czechoslovakia. Chernysh becomes an officer in charge of a division of young, inexperienced troops about to enter their first battle against German SS troops. After a series of attacks and counter-attacks, they suffer heavy casualties in the fighting and experience a shortage of equipment. At the most crucial moment, when the Soviet forces are in danger of being wiped out, Vorontsov, commander of the division, takes the initiative and orders the standard-bearers to carry the banners in full view of the fighting men. This act has a bracing effect on the men and fills them with pride, courage and heroism. Their heightened morale spurs them on to defeat the Germans. This is the climax. It contains Honchar's main thesis that Communism as a way of life, symbolized by the banner, is basic to the creation of heroic people who collectively determine the path of history.

The moral superiority of the Soviet individual is again salient in the episode involving the siege of a railway station; here Khoma Khayetsky in the role of liberator rescues prisoners about to be burned alive by Germans. As the war draws to an end in the novel Honchar, in brief but detailed sketches, draws comparisons between the "imperialistic" way of life and the



humanistic Soviet way. Moving towards Prague, after news of Germany's surrender reaches them, the soldiers of the regiment engage the Germans in still another battle in a field of red poppies; here Shura Yasnohorska is killed. The tragedy of her death does not cast a sorrowful light on the whole work, but merely emphasizes the price the Soviet Army has paid in order for it to achieve its messianic goal--"the liberation of people oppressed by war and by capitalism." The tragic element gives depth to the victorious destiny of the Soviet soldier, and the novel ends on a highly optimistic note.

Soviet literary critics consider the figure of the hero to be the most important element in novels of socialist realism dealing with war.<sup>3</sup> The hero of this novel is the nation personified by the collective of soldiers of Samiyev's regiment. The nation is seen by Honchar as a harmonious working mass finding itself within the social revolution. This family consists of separate individuals bound together by love for the Fatherland, the source of their love for one another.<sup>4</sup> While presenting the singular hero, the collective nation, Honchar simultaneously attempts to draw various portraits, individualized faces, and to trace biographies. The characters embody all the best and typical qualities of a Soviet citizen. Each has been nurtured in the spirit of communism, each carries

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<sup>3</sup> Leonid Novychenko, "Pro tvorchist' Olesya Honchara," in Honchar, Tvory ([2d ed.]; Kiev, 1959), I, xiv.

<sup>4</sup> Shamota, "Oles' Honchar," p. vi.



forward the "new, most progressive" culture and way of life. They are people of various professions of warfare, nationalities, ages, and backgrounds. They differ in manners and customs. Honchar tries to encompass all of humanity: from the kolkhoz peasant Khoma Khayetsky to the academic Bryansky; from the battle-hardened veteran Voronsky to the novice Chernysh. Hence the "epic" nature of the work. In presenting various types of individuals found in a people, a whole nation is thought, by Soviet literary figures, to be portrayed.<sup>5</sup>

The positive hero is the embodiment of the fondest dreams of the Soviet people according to socialist-realist theory.<sup>6</sup> He carries within him pure, limitless dedication to the Soviet Fatherland, an ability to overcome the most difficult obstacles, and a wealth of moral and spiritual feelings that cannot be matched by the non-Soviet individual. In portraying all the characters as positive heroes, the writer attempts to convey the idea that lofty moral qualities are endowed not only to a few people but to millions of Soviet people.<sup>7</sup>

The fate of the positive hero is always a noble and beautiful one in works of socialist realism. The death of the

<sup>5</sup> Andriy Trypil's'ky, "Problemy estetyky v svitli XXII z'yizdu KPRS," Suchasnist' i maysternist' (Kiev, 1963), p. 55.

<sup>6</sup> Leonid Kovalenko, "Obraz pozytyvnoho heroya v povo-yenniy prozi," Pytannya ukrayins'koyi radyans'koyi literatury: Literaturno-krytychni stati (Kiev, 1955), p. 65.

<sup>7</sup> B. S. Buryak (ed.), Istoriya ukrayins'koyi radyans'koyi literatury, p. 806.



soldier Hay is illustrative of this. A young and innocent boy, he is captivated by the world around him, particularly by the beauties of nature. His love of nature is always related in some way to his love of his country. For example, if the fragrance of the grass is particularly wonderful, it makes him recall and compare it to the grass of his homeland. The war does not dull his sensitivity to nature's gifts, but sharpens his awareness of the beauty and value of life. Essentially, nature is a medium for the contemplation of Soviet life. One day, while bending down to pick some flowers, he steps on a mine. Only then, as he lies lifeless upon the ground having sacrificed his life, does he reveal his physical and spiritual beauty. When the soldiers try to remove the sweet basil clutched in his hand, Hay, even in death, keeps a firm hold on the field flower of his native land. Whether the fate of a Soviet soldier be life or death, its nobility exists in the immortal patriotic conviction implicit in the deed that brought it about. The Soviet people must be shown as creators of their own fate.<sup>8</sup> In this work it is because of a soldier's profound dedication to the Fatherland that he will achieve a noble, sometimes tragic, but always beautiful destiny.

Honchar's original idea in the trilogy was to immortalize the Belorussian Bryansky,<sup>9</sup> the former student of mathematics who, under the guidance of the old-guard Bolshevik

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<sup>8</sup>Babyshkin, Radyans'ke literaturoznavstvo, No. 11 (1949), p. 20.

<sup>9</sup>Novychenko, p. xvii.



Vorontsov, becomes a platoon commander. Honchar succeeds to a degree in this purpose owing to the tight thematic structure of the novel. Bryansky, in the first part, meets with death by his own grenade. Only after his death does the reader become truly acquainted with the kind of person he was. Those deep impressions left upon the consciences of his troops are basic communist teachings that sprang from Bryansky's own profound convictions. He approaches war objectively and is of the belief that one can really profit from one's war experiences. As the Soviet fighters proceed along the road of victory, they become enlightened to the living conditions outside their own socialist country. They are, of course, continuously aware of their identity and purpose in life. (This awareness is evident in Bryansky's discourses and philosophical pronouncements.) Bryansky is immortal in his troops' memory and influences them thereby: thus he determines the course of history.

The integrity of Bryansky's spirit, the nature of his conscience, is embodied in the character Shura. The predominant feature of both is their loyalty to one another, a loyalty paralleled only by their loyalty to their country. This constancy becomes most pronounced when it is threatened by a love that grows between Chernysh and Shura. Here Bryansky's memory becomes even more influential. It forms a link between the characters and their behaviour. Bryansky acts as a "Lenin" figure who follows the soldiers, imbuing them with the will



to win:

Chernysh wanted to say a great deal to this young widowed girl with the small white hands and eyes full of sorrow, but he did not permit himself to speak. He knew that whatever he might say would hurt her, for everything in one way or another would refer to Yuriy [Bryansky]; everything would be permeated with his memory. For although they did not speak of him, he was always with them, always amongst them.<sup>10</sup>

In the trilogy the Communist Party is represented by Major Vorontsov who accompanies the soldiers from battle to battle, encouraging and fortifying them with his communist preachings. Most important is that he is able to rectify a difficult situation and lead his troops to victory. Honchar places this type of character, obligatory in novels of socialist realism, in the background. When compared with other characters his role is quantitatively small, but qualitatively his personality reveals the most positive features an individual could possess. He enters the foreground at the decisive point in the novel: it is he who takes the initiative, contrary to the orders of the inexperienced academic Samiyev, in commanding that the banners be carried in full view of the soldiers. This action embodies Honchar's theme that it is an extraordinary feeling of patriotism--Soviet patriotism--which spurs the Red Army on to victory.

The enthusiastic Ukrainian collective farmer, Khoma Khayetsky, plays the comic role in the novel. Of all the figures he is considered by Soviet critics Honchar's most

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<sup>10</sup> Oles' Honchar, Praporonostsi: Trylohiya (Kiev, 1962), p. 190.



convincing.<sup>11</sup> Honchar describes his personality by ascribing to him distinct Ukrainian features such as a sense of humour, idiomatic and colourful language, and a straightforward, peasant-like approach to life. Khoma is the prototype of the New Soviet Man. Schooled in war, he evolves in status from that of a provincial peasant to that of a person capable of questioning the political future of Europe. He begins to see himself as a builder, master and defender of the Soviet system. In the "academy of socialism" his interests broaden and he grows ideologically. This is especially evident in the episode of Khoma's speech to the Budapest Parliament in which he expresses the feelings of the entire Soviet people. As a communist, Honchar has embodied in this character the basic idea of his novel, the idea that patriotism is a feature inherent in all Soviet citizens.

Chernysh is presented from a sympathetic point of view. He represents the typical young member of the Komsomol--innocent, idealistic, eager to learn, and willing to fight for his country. Honchar interjects him between the reader and the other characters of his novel. This manner of construction supports the view that Chernysh speaks for the author himself. The frequent use of interior monologue by this character appears to confirm such an interpretation.

Generally the characterizations strike one as being superficial. All the characters are pure in feelings and

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<sup>11</sup> Babyshkin, Radyans'ke literaturoznavstvo, No. 11 (1949), p. 26.



motivations, courageous, morally strong and good to their very depth; they lack any weaknesses that might act as genuine obstacles on their road to victory. The feature most accentuated is each soldier's love for and responsibility to his Fatherland. The abundance of common features reduces the characters to mere stereotypes, all basically alike.

As the action progresses no real development of the characters takes place. Because each contains within him the usual basic qualities of the Soviet citizen from the beginning, no room is left for improvement. Having no inner conflicts, these characters change only in becoming enlightened as to their own true nature, only in their realization of their power and righteousness as communists. Honchar does this by juxtaposing two opposing social systems, capitalism and communism. Capitalism is shown only in its negative aspects, and communism only in its positive aspects. Such a black-and-white portrayal lessens a character's involvement in overcoming obstacles, thus changing himself. The superiority of Soviet soldiers is established from the very first action to the concluding battle in the Valley of the Red Poppies. The Soviet soldier has but one destiny.

"The success of this battle depends first of all upon us," Vorontsov said, polishing each word as a turner at the lathe. "We, as Communists and members of the Komsomol, should know where our place is in the march and in the night battle. Our place is in the first column."

"We will prevail here because we are Bolsheviks."<sup>12</sup> . . .

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<sup>12</sup>Honchar, Praporonostsi, p. 84.



The outcome of the novel is entirely predictable since the author presupposes the ideological and moral superiority of Soviet soldiers. Conflict exists neither within the individual character nor within the collective. Consequently, there is no real suspense. Whatever the outcome, life or death, it is always essentially a victorious one.

A peculiar situation does arise when ideals conflict with reality. Following Bryansky's death, Shura wishes to remain faithful to him, for one of his cardinal beliefs is that of constancy.

Not because she is the most beautiful girl in the world. No, I'm not an idealist. But this particular girl, neither better or worse, I can love, and in this way she appears as the most beautiful. That's why I believe in myself and in her. . . . And I am happy that I was born as her one and only lover. Is there such a thing? If there is no such thing, then let it be now--for this very love makes me rich and strong. I always feel myself rich and strong. Because of this, I say that the highest beauty is the beauty of constancy.<sup>13</sup>

To effect his original plan of immortalizing the Soviet Army and Bryansky's existence, Shura, the embodiment of Bryansky, wishes to remain true not only to Bryansky's memory, but also to his beliefs. Her love for Chernysh conflicts with Honchar's plan and makes the reader curious as to how he will resolve the situation. Shura realizes that people can be motivated in life by something equally as strong as love. Love for one's people and devotion to one's nation and its mission becomes the dominant motivation in her life. A just decision

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<sup>13</sup>Ibid., pp. 68-69.



concerning her future with Chernysh is possible only after she fulfills her primary duty to her country, only after all the oppressed people have been liberated. Shura, however, is killed before she can indicate what her decision will be. The conflict remains unsolved. Soviet critics have interpreted her death as a price the Soviet Army had to pay to win the war.<sup>14</sup> Yet the idea of Soviet sacrifices was illustrated previously by the death of Bryansky in the first part of the novel. Since Shura is the shadow of Bryansky, her death does not carry the tragic overtones to the degree his does, nor does it contribute much to the thematic structure of the work. It is more likely that Shura's death is an unconscious or conscious evasion by Honchar in resolving the conflict.

Romanticism is that aspect of art where the author, through his feelings and fantasy, attempts to reveal the inner life of man, that of the soul. In idealizing the Soviet Army Honchar makes use of number of romantic images.<sup>15</sup> Features of his language such as comparisons, metaphors, alliterations, and epithets help to visualize the different settings of the battlefield. Thus the author gives his conception of future life and points out the fundamental and determining things in this life. At the basis of each image lies fantasy which, according to the theory of socialist realism,<sup>16</sup> allows the

<sup>14</sup>Babyshkin, Radyans'ke literaturoznavstvo, No. 11 (1949), p. 26.

<sup>15</sup>Buryak (ed.), Istoriya . . ., p. 461.

<sup>16</sup>V'yazovs'ky, p. 13.



writer to perceive not only the present, but to project himself into the future. The writer, having chosen his images, then proceeds to attach an ideological value to them.<sup>17</sup>

Landscape description plays a particular role in setting the romantic-heroic tone of the work. Often much psychological insight underlies the landscape sketches. These descriptions may be a reflection of the inner feelings of the character in question. In this way the ideological attitude characterizing the positive hero is related to the form of the novel. The landscape descriptions, organically related to the development of the action, create an emotional mood in the reader. In clear, vivid, sensory images Honchar describes land topography, the weather, and the inhabitants of a region, and his pictures acquire a spirit and take on emotional colour that reflects the actual movements of the Soviet troops in occupied territory.

Another feature indicative of the technical proficiency of the work is the skillful method Honchar uses in uniting the past, present, and future into a whole. In his sense-memory associations, he slips easily from the past to the present and to the future. This continuum in time has the effect of fusing the novel's different parts.

Since ideological concepts are contained in romantic imagery and embodied in the characters, this is bound to the form of the work. Honchar's style is characterized by a

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid., p. 14.



particular ability to take advantage of the ideological aspect of plastic, concrete images. The language--exact, economical, and colourful--is laden with heavy symbolic meaning. Ideological motifs and symbols evoking patriotic sentiments are woven into the texture of the language and act as unifying devices in the three parts. The most obvious symbol is the letter "L" which acts as a guide to the Soviet troops. Its meaning is never explicitly stated, but it is possibly symbolic of the Marxist-Leninist philosophy guiding the nation to victory.

Honchar adorns the epic-narrative with national aphorisms and old national sayings. Foreign words and phrases are frequently used either to individualize a character, as in the case of Khoma Khayetsky, or to establish couleur locale. An unusual number of Russian words can be found, surprisingly, even when the person being characterized is not a Russian.

In Soviet literature romanticism is combined with realism.<sup>18</sup> There is no such creative method as romanticism alone, only the single, all-embracing method of socialist realism. Belinsky defined the sphere of romanticism as "everything inner, the spiritual life of man, that secret part of the soul and heart whence arise all the unusual yearnings for the better and the higher, striving to find contentment in ideals by the creative fantasy."<sup>19</sup> Soviet critics consider their romanticism

<sup>18</sup> Suchasnist' i maysternist', p. 199.

<sup>19</sup> V. H. Belinsky, Sobranie sochineniy v trekh tomakh



more earthy than the romanticism of Western literature, as they claim it is firmly bound with concrete facts of reality.<sup>20</sup> Consistent to their views, out of living reality emerge romantic images that are fundamental to the socialist realist. Honchar's trilogy has been cited as an excellent example of romanticism combined with the use of concrete historical data. The reverse is true.

Honchar does not portray the conquering Soviet Army in an unprejudiced, truthful manner, nor does he choose the most typical features of this army, its allies and its enemies; rather he selects only those facts that coincide with his prejudiced conception of Soviet and non-Soviet peoples. Instead of perceiving, generalizing, and then attaching ideological significance to phenomena, he only perceives what is in accordance with communist philosophy. All of the characters are shown in the process of being enlightened on the evils of capitalism. The spiritual qualities of the positive hero, which can emerge at times of stress, are not convincing because of the author's one-sided interpretation of the reality in which this character lives. By fitting together bits of real life and propaganda Honchar attempts to make the two indistinguishable from each other. The a priori assumption concerning the moral superiority of Soviet society makes genuine conflict

(Moscow, 1948), III, 217, cited by M. M. Ostryk, Romantyka v literaturi sotsialistychnoho realizmu (Kiev, 1964), p. 13.

<sup>20</sup> Suchasnist' i maysternist', p. 200.



impossible, and the work is reduced to a hyper-romantic, lyrical description of this society.

In conclusion, Praporonostsi is an epic work glorifying the historical liberating mission of the Soviet Army. Symbolizing the new life, the Soviet soldiers are the standard-bearers of communist ideology in the war of the opposing ways of life. By approaching war as a purposeful task, man in the process can be transformed into a person of a higher morality. Ardent patriotism renders the fighters invincible, for it is mandatory for the Soviet writer to show that patriotism stems from communist convictions.<sup>21</sup> In this work the banner symbolizes "true" democracy, while its carriers are liberators not only of prisoners of war, but of people oppressed by an inferior way of life.

"Major, and what about the railway tracks?" asked one of the soldiers. "They are also different! Ours are wider; theirs are narrower. Will they be widened someday so that they are the same everywhere?"

"Of course they will!"

"And who will set the standard: they or we?"

"Only we," laughed Vorontsov. "Don't you know, Comrades, that a train runs more firmly on wider tracks?"<sup>22</sup>

In their patriotism the fighters envisage only one destiny--inevitable victory. They, as a collective, will shape the course of history and create heroes out of ordinary men.

Soviet nationalism has long been part of official ideology, and the Second World War gave writers the opportunity to carry out the Party's injunction of extolling this patriotism.

<sup>21</sup>Yarmolinsky, Literature Under Communism, p. 62.

<sup>22</sup>Honchar, Praporonostsi, p. 182.



Praporonostsi met with official approval because of the patriotic nature of its theme. It would be unjust to say, however, that this alone makes Honchar one of the most popular prose writers in the Soviet Union. By fusing his romantic form with the content, the novel has a solidity in its technical structure. It is, however, the fundamental assumption made by Honchar--Soviet superiority--that weakens the intellectual aspect and decreases the novel's significance as a work of art.



## CHAPTER IV

### MYKHAYLO STELMAKH

#### Biography

Mykhaylo Panasovych Stelmakh belongs to the generation of writers who began their literary careers on the eve of the Second World War and developed into mature artists after 1945.<sup>1</sup> He was born on May 24, 1912, in a village of Litynske Region (Vinnytsya Province). In peasant surroundings he spent his early childhood and youth. He completed the seventh form in his village and later entered the Pedagogical Institute of Vinnytsya. After graduating in 1933, he taught Ukrainian language and literature in village schools; his interest in Ukrainian folklore dates from that time.

Stelmakh took his first steps in the field of poetry towards the end of the nineteen twenties when he had his correspondence-sketches and verses published in the journal, Molody bil'shovyk (Young Bolshevik). His first book of verse,

<sup>1</sup>The biographical data were taken from the following sources: Yuriy Burlyay, Mykhaylo Stel'makh, literaturny portret (Kiev, 1962), passim; O. Babyshkin, Literaturnye portrety (Kiev, 1960), II, 539; "Mykhaylo Stel'makh," Ukrayins'ka radyans'ka entsyklopediya (Kiev, 1963), XIV, 82; Kylymnyk (ed.), Pys'mennyky radyans'koyi Ukrayiny, pp. 456-57; Buryak (ed.), Istoriya ukrayins'koyi radyans'koyi literatury, pp. 386 and 820-22; and Introduction to Stelmakh's "The Return of the Wild Swans," trans. Margaret Wettlin, Soviet Literature, No. 3, 1965, p. 5.



Dobry ranok (Good Morning), appeared in 1941; thus Ukrainian literature acquired a fresh, talented poet nurtured in the atmosphere of the countryside. In his imagery of nature Stelmakh voiced his philosophic creed--to love life and people boundlessly.

In 1939 Stelmakh entered the Soviet Army and fought in the war as an artilleryman. Although he lay wounded in a hospital, he continued to work for the front-line paper, Za chest' bat'kivshchyny (For the Honour of the Fatherland), and was the recipient of medals and orders for his efforts. During the War two more books of verse were published: Za yasni zori (For Bright Stars) and Provesen' (Early Spring). Other collections were Shlyakhy svitannya (Paths of Light) (1948), Zhytosly nabyrayet'sya (The Rye is Growing Stronger) (1954), Poeziyi (Poems) (1958), and several booklets for children. The war infused an undercurrent of tragedy into his poetry, and his love for his native land and people became more sharply defined.

From 1945 to 1953 Stelmakh worked as an academic researcher at the Institute of Culture, Folklore, and Ethnography in Kiev. Turning to prose, his first work was the collection of ten short stories, Berezovy sik (Birch Sap), published in 1944. The stories, written in a lyrical and emotional narrative style, portray the Soviet people as heroes who fall upon the road because they are mortals, but who nevertheless triumph spiritually in their struggle against the Germans. This early



prose reveals the influence of the neo-romanticist Yuriy Yanovsky and the impressionist writers S. Vasylchenko and M. Kotsybubinsky. The collection stands as a prologue to his subsequent poetical prose.

His first significant novel was Velyka ridnya (The Big Family) (1951). In this work he creates major characters and traces events in their lives through turbulent times. In two parts, Na nashiy zemli (On Our Land) and Velyki perelohy (Great Fields), the novel encompasses the period from the end of the Civil War to the liberation of Soviet Ukraine from German occupation. This epic work describing national life is by genre a romantic chronicle. In the first part, depicting life in a Ukrainian village from 1920 to 1925, the Communist Party is regarded as showing the peasants the way toward the new collective life. The second part depicts the Soviet people in their struggle during the Second World War. The hero evolves from a kolkhoz brigadier in the first part to a partisan fighter in the second. Stelmakh, concerned with the spiritual aspect of his heroes, describes their inner life as well as their outward deeds, their exploits in a partisan detachment operating in Soviet Ukraine. This novel was awarded a State prize of the third rank.

By 1950 the name Stelmakh had become widely known. During the next few years he worked for various journals. A new novel, Nad Cheremoshem (At the Cheremosh), appearing in 1952, had as its theme the changes occurring on a collective



farm at the end of the forties. Here the reader becomes aware of the author's fine lyricism, his wealth of peasant folklore, and the abundance of poetic figures, all enriching his narrative style.

His comedy about life on a collective farm, Zolota mete-lytsya (The Golden Snowstorm) (1955), is not considered to be as significant as his former works in the view of critics; consequently, it has not received much attention. Its theme and the inclusion of folklore material is in keeping with Stelmakh's general style and subject matter.

The year 1957 saw the appearance of one of Stelmakh's more important novels, Krov lyuds'ka--ne vodytsya (Let the Blood of Man Not Flow). The earlier work, Na nashiy zemli, serves as the basis of this novel concerning the struggle of a Ukrainian village against "counter-revolutionary" forces during the Civil War. Here Stelmakh is primarily occupied with the question of land and its rightful inheritors. Dealing with the problem philosophically, he concludes that the land belongs to those who have suffered and toiled over it. His prose style in this novel is even more poetic than in previous works, and it is evident that the poetic substance of his symbolic generalizations comprise his chief means of communication. The novel has been translated into English and adapted for the cinema by a Soviet film studio.

Stelmakh's immense work, Khlib i sil' (Bread and Salt), written two years later, is a prologue to Krov lyuds'ka--ne



vodytsya. In it he recreates the life of a village during the first Russian Revolution. The theme of the land is central to the novel, whose heroes dream about it, search for it, and die for it. Land is more than a means of physical survival to the peasant: it is a source of his moral enrichment and self-realization. The novel's three parts deal with the conditions of the "landless" farm-labourers forced to abandon their native homes and to seek land in Siberia. Stelmakh glorifies peasant life in its simplicity and strength. He delves philosophically into the psyche of the peasant whose moral criteria are the symbols--bread, salt, and honour. With the use of colloquial words and figures of speech, he colourfully describes the peasant customs, way of life, and standards. The trilogy, composed of this novel, Velyka ridnya and Krov lyuds'ka--ne vodytsya, earned Stelmakh a Lenin Prize in 1961.

Stelmakh's last great epos was the 1961 novel Pravda i kryvda (Truth and Falsehood), known also as Marko Bezsmertny. It concerns life in a Ukrainian village burnt by war in the spring of 1945. Out of the war emerged people, not necessarily class enemies, who put their own interests above those of others. In great detail Stelmakh describes such negative characters who act as a threat to the peace and progress of the collective farm and its members. Truth and righteousness are embodied in the character of Marko Bezsmertny, whom the story is about. Stelmakh weaves a humanistic philosophy around the peasant and his mode of existence. This philosophy applies to



Marko, a bulwark against the evils that endanger humanity, who strives to root out these evils, these vestiges of the war which infect society and hinder its progress. The work's style is again lyrical and romantic; it is permeated with colloquial speech and village ideas, and folklorist elements. The novel achieves depth not only in its portrayal of historical reality by means of digressive passages, but also in the complexity and universality of the philosophical questions raised. The novel was made into a play in 1965. Consisting of three acts and a prologue and epilogue, it is generally similar in content to the original work.

Stelmakh's most recent prose work, Husy-lebedi letyat' (The Return of the Wild Geese), appeared in 1965. About a hundred pages in length, the novel, by and large autobiographical, concerns a young boy, Mykhaylo, born of poor peasants, who becomes conscious of his love for books, knowledge, and the people from whom he sprang. Detailed characterizations, humour, and warm sympathy for the boy, his family and acquaintances, make the novel moving. The Revolution is given a significant place in the action of the novel, which consists mainly of a series of sketches. It is the portrayal of the boy and his relationship with his family and friends, however, that remains unforgettable.

The novels of Stelmakh have been translated into several languages including English. Stelmakh's activities, however, are not confined to writing. Like other Soviet literary figures



he takes part in cultural, public and political undertakings (as a member of delegations representing the Soviet arts, as a speaker at writers' conferences, and so forth). In 1959 he attended the Fourteenth General Assembly of the United Nations as one of the delegates of the Ukrainian S.S.R. Stelmakh is presently a Deputy to the Supreme Soviet of the U.S.S.R., and is on the Presidium of the Union of Soviet Ukrainian Writers.

### Pravda i kryvda<sup>2</sup>

Once in a village lived two brothers, one very rich and the other very poor. The poor brother believes that although life is bitter it is better to live according to the truth. The rich one claims that truth does not exist: only evil exists and one should live accordingly. In seeking an answer to whether truth does or does not exist the poor brother loses the little wealth he possesses as well as his eyesight to the rich brother and is forced to beg along the wayside. Returning home one night, he loses his way in the forest. Fearing the wild animals, the unfortunate man climbs a tree and sits there until morning. During the night under that very tree three devils and their leader meet and talk of the wicked deeds they have committed the previous day. The man discovers from their conversation how he can regain his sight, bring water to a village

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<sup>2</sup>The paragraph which follows is a summary of the folk tale, "Pravda i kryvda," as reproduced in F. M. Polishchuk (ed.), Khrestomatiya z ukrayins'koyi narodnoyi tvorchosti (Kiev, 1959), pp. 69-73.



whose wells have dried up, and cure a king's daughter. The next morning, having regained his sight, he muses that since God has helped him he will try to relieve others of their misfortunes--he will bring water to the village and cure the sick princess. He returns home more prosperous than his wealthy brother. The latter, envious of his once poverty-stricken brother, seeks to learn how he, too, can obtain such good fortune. Having learned the secret, the jealous and greedy man runs to the woods, climbs the tree, and awaits the arrival of the devils. They come, but anxious lest they be overheard as they had been the night before, they look about, find the rich man and tear him apart.

The moral of this old Ukrainian tale is that good does exist in the world and that it will eventually conquer evil. This is the theme of Stelmakh's lengthy novel, Pravda i kryvda. The author attempts a moralistic work in which good and evil are embodied in positive and negative characters. The setting is a collective farm in Ukraine during 1945. In the following analysis the means by which Stelmakh resolves a problem basically philosophical in nature--in the light of the tenets of socialist realism--will be determined.

The aforementioned philosophical problem is stated in the prologue. Marko Bezsmertny, the hero, symbolizes the ideal of truth. He returns mutilated from the war and is taken to a hospital where the doctors fight to save his life. Lying on the operating table he has a vision of two roads: one--grey and hazy--leads into darkness; the other--bright and sunny--



passes through his village. An apparition symbolizing death informs him that his time has arrived. He fights off Death by claiming that since the Revolution he is no longer accursed, and that he has neither sown, reaped, nor loved; he has not outlived his time. His brothers through faith, conscience and love will imbue his heart with life-giving blood. As Death recedes, he finds himself walking along the road of life. He lives, having survived the evils that attempted to destroy him, by what he represents--truth.

Left a widower, homeless and crippled, Marko returns to his mother. Around him he sees nothing but death and destruction--vestiges of the war. Sorrowfully he and his mother recall the death of his father, and his sister lost somewhere in Germany. Symbolically they burn the document that reported his own death. Marko learns of the unlawful and cruel deeds of Anton Bezborodko, present head of the kolkhoz. The peasants beg Marko to resume his former position as kolkhoz Chairman and to rid them of their deceitful leader. Marko observes the people and understands their frustrated hopes and efforts. His heart becomes heavy with sadness. From this picture of destruction both to man and to the land he begins to realize what is required of a good leader. The silhouette of a woman emerges from the ruins. A voice speaks to him. It is his fate; it is good and beautiful.

Marko befriends an artist and school-teacher, Hryhoriy Zadniprovsky, who relates the tragic events of his former life.



Hryhoriy's lengthy narrative is a lesson in patriotism, love and compassion. Marko and Hryhoriy discuss the evils in society which must be eradicated if good is to prevail. Marko's feelings of responsibility toward the people are further aroused when he sees Bezborodko associating with unsavoury characters such as Mamura.

At this point the author focusses his attention on Zadniprovsky's family. Stepanyda, once Marko's bethrothed, is taking leave of her step-brother, Hryhoriy. Bezborodko's malicious nature is further stressed when the reader learns of his deliberate attempt to sever the relationship between Marko and Stepanyda. Later, Zadniprovsky encounters his arch-enemy, Potsiluyko, who threatens to blackmail him by accusing him of bourgeois nationalism--a credible stratagem--if he does not forge a document permitting him, Potsiluyko, to become a member of the Communist Party. Potsiluyko's efforts are thwarted. When he approaches Kateryna, Zadniprovsky's wife, his threats are unsuccessful, for she recalls his past ill deeds. At this point Stelmakh digresses and relates Potsiluyko's crimes, those of a character personifying evil. The blackest of his deeds is his betrayal to the Germans of the widow Vasylyna Vakulenka for harbouring Soviet partisan fighters. Potsiluyko and Bezborodko align themselves against Marko who they fear will assume their position of power in the kolkhoz.

The turning point comes when truth begins to prevail. One day Marko comes upon the village women driven into the



freezing water cutting hemp at the orders of Bezborodko. Enraged, Marko impulsively instructs them to come out of the crippling water, whereupon he drives Bezborodko himself into it at the point of a gun, thus humiliating him before the peasants. Marko's crutches fall from him as he steps forward to lead the people. As the culmination of this incident Marko is called to appear before a plenum. He persuasively argues his case and officially becomes head of the kolkhoz.

As an ideal leader, Marko begins to rid the community of evils standing in the way of a happy and fruitful life for the peasants. Successes ensue: milk is obtained for the orphans; the cows are cured of ringworm; the peasants come forth with creative ideas for increasing the productivity of the kolkhoz. But evil lurks not far away, for Bezborodko is more determined than ever to regain control. His strategy is to let Marko deal with the problems that he, Bezborodko, had created, and to scrutinize Marko's actions and expose his mistakes. But Marko's actions are noble, humanistic, and irreproachable. He instils pride and honour into a young woman carrying an illegitimate child, thus enabling her to make her way in society. He perceives the boundless sorrow of unfulfilled young women and persuades a jailer to release men whose crimes are minimal so that they may marry these women and thus keep them from withering away.

Marko and all that he represents--truth--are firmly established when his most formidable enemy, Kysil, Head of the



District Administration, is defeated. Kysil, presiding at the plenum, is unable to find Marko guilty of wrongfully opposing authority. He fears that Marko will reveal the wicked acts of his past and would like him eliminated to ensure his own security. Upon inspecting the kolkhoz that Marko administers, he is irritated by the extraordinary achievements he finds and is driven to charge that the issuance of free borshch to the peasants is unlawful. At first his criticisms are tolerated, but Marko loses patience and orders him off the kolkhoz. Kysil accuses Marko of being an anarchist, whereupon Marko charges Kysil with being a Trotskyite.<sup>3</sup> At this point Kysil comes face to face with the First Secretary of the Central Committee, Nikita Sergeyevich Khrushchev himself. Kysil loses his job, and Khrushchev and the peasants partake of the free borshch and bread.

All problems are resolved. Marko's daughter returns from a German concentration camp. Hryhoriy, unjustly imprisoned, is freed when Marko intervenes for him with the Central Committee. Potsiluyko is arrested for betraying the widow Vakulenko. "The time of the viper has passed. Now comes the time of pure beauty and great stars."<sup>4</sup>

The theme of Pravda i kryvda is the moral problem of truth versus falsehood or, simply, good versus evil. The novel is broad in its scope in dealing with philosophical subjects.

<sup>3</sup>The implication, that Kysil is an adherent of Trotskyism, is politically an extremely unfavourable one.

<sup>4</sup>Mykhaylo Stel'makh, Pravda i kryvda (Kiev, 1961), p. 463.



It raises timeless questions: Why is one born? What should one do? What road should one take? Stelmakh depicts the forces of evil directed against humanity. Underlying his philosophy is the supposition that man cannot live happily if evil exists nearby.

Stelmakh considers the ideology of fascism to be one of the greatest evils. It not only brings hunger, poverty, destitution, and death, but attempts to break the individual, to render him spiritless, and to force him along the path of falsehood and evil. Out of the Second World War emerged people who put their own interests above those of others. Stelmakh personifies this particular evil in his negative characters--opportunists in the lower administrative organs of the State.

The positive ideal is embodied in the main positive characters--Marko Bezsmertny, Hryhoriy Zadniprovsky, Brovarnyk, and the peasants. The difference between the positive and negative character is not in the class to which they belong, but in their moral outlook. The actions and fate of the heroes and villains are secondary to their philosophy of life. The conflict of the novel is between two principal modes of existence that emerge when Stelmakh digresses to show his characters in various circumstances and in a broader spectrum.

Marko Bezsmertny is for Stelmakh the embodiment of all that is good. He is honourable, just, strong, and courageous. He is a humanist. Returning from the war he encounters a new wave of injustice involving political accusations and reprisals.



Instead of weakening his humanistic convictions, these evils spur him on to destroy what is destroying humanity. He enters the novel as an already formed individual. Stelmakh's revelation of his past life suggests the ideal nature of his character: he had fought against the counter-revolutionaries; he had been Head of the Village Council in the early years of the Stalin regime; he had earned the Order of Lenin for his heroic deeds in the War. Now, in 1945, he regains his position of kolkhoz chairman and brings material prosperity to the peasants. More significantly, he is the spiritual leader who distinguishes right from wrong, seeks the truth, and creates situations where the truth may take root in life and flourish. He is like a messiah delivering the people from servitude and moral degradation. His conception of life is conveyed by the peasants whose values reflect his own. He sets himself the task of saving these people. The name, Bezsmertny, meaning "the immortal one" tells the reader that what Marko represents--the truth--is immortal and unconquerable.

Love is the basis of Marko's philosophy. Upon making the acquaintance of Hryhoriy Zadniprovsky, Marko perceives in him a capacity for forgiveness, compassion, and love. The spiritual richness of Hryhoriy's soul is the result of a series of tragic experiences in his past that wrought in him an awareness of his love for his country, for woman and womanhood, for life itself. Through suffering and hardship Hryhoriy has learned that one can be happy when one loves. He actualizes



this conviction when he marries Kateryna, a widow with a large family, who needs his support even though she cannot forget her former husband. Unlike Marko, Hryhoriy acquires his moral qualities by enduring pain and by learning to understand and accept reality.

Love comes from songs, from the bread of one's father, from nature. The land and the life closely associated with it is sacred for Marko, for in it resides all beauty and the seed of life which is truth. Stelmakh poetizes and idealizes the life of the peasant who, in cultivating the land, nurtures his soul. Implicitly expressed is the concept of the worth of toil. Beauty and happiness exist in doing, in creating. Man, who voluntarily engages in creative work, makes himself. The peasant, exemplary for all mankind, is symbolized by the sunflower. With feet firmly implanted in the earth, in reality, the head aspires toward the sun, toward the heavens. Numerous peasant characters pass before the reader's eyes. They are treated humorously, but with great love and tenderness. They are not superhuman, but only ordinary people of the soil possessing the strength, durability, and shrewdness necessary for survival, and those human foibles so characteristic of people of this kind.

War, bureaucracy, spiritual depravity, and cynicism hinder the establishment of a Utopian life. The negative characters, reflecting kryvda, either obscure or hide behind pravda. Generally they are administrators: Bezborodko is a kolkhoz chairman; Kysil--Head of the District Administration



of the settlement; and others are their assistants. Stelmakh, by giving them positions of leadership, wants to point out their errors and misconceptions and to criticize them as leaders. They are communists in name only, people characterized by jealousy, a lack of charity, cynicism, and an inability to distinguish right from wrong. Here Stelmakh is indirectly criticizing the cult of the personality.<sup>5</sup>

The negative characters, however, are rendered so completely negative that they are unreal and unconvincing. Another of their weaknesses is that the author fails to answer the question as to how such unsavoury individuals came into existence. Stelmakh merely describes his characters externally or superficially without really analyzing them psychologically. A problem arises for the Soviet critic concerning the source of the spiritless and opportunistic. Stelmakh has been criticized by Soviet literary authorities because he is more concerned with the thoughts and philosophy of these characters<sup>6</sup> than with the social implications of his characters. Stelmakh left the socialist problematics on the periphery of the work without incorporating it in his characters. This comment has been made even by Soviet critics.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>5</sup>Stelmakh permits historical falsification when the partisan teacher Zadniprovsky speaks in 1945 as if he had heard Khrushchev's speech to the Central Committee of the CPSU at the XXII Congress. *Koshelivets'*, Suchasna literatura v URSR, p. 217.

<sup>6</sup>Borys Buryak, Za zakonamy krasy (Kiev, 1963), p. 29.

<sup>7</sup>See, for example, Mykhaylo Levchenko, Roman i suchasnist' (Kiev, 1963), p. 217.



A hero must be viewed by the socialist realist in terms of his growth with that of the mass.<sup>8</sup> Marko Bezsmertny, however, is not a hero in this sense. He does not reach the ideal gradually: he is an ideal person from the beginning. Another criterion of a hero according to the principle of realism is that, although he must possess ideal qualities, he should not be idealized beyond the point of credulity.<sup>9</sup> He is only meaningful when the reader can believe in him and identify with him. Marko is not ordinary and, least of all, typical. He is a morally superior person qualified to lead the people. He is humane but not human. Hryhoriy Zadniprovsky more closely approximates the hero in this sense for Stelmakh explains his present attitudes by tracing his moral development and showing the motivations for his activities. Even he, however, falls short of the requirements of a hero of socialist realism. The conflicts that shape his character are moral, not social.<sup>10</sup>

The resolution of the conflict between the forces of good and evil is superficial and unrealistic. A good illustration of this is the climax in which Marko defeats his enemy,

<sup>8</sup>Yuriy Kobylets'ky, "Utverdzhennya metodu sotsialistychnoho realizmu v ukrayins'kiy radyans'kiy literaturi 20-kh rokiv," Suchasnist' i maysternist' (Kiev, 1963), p. 59.

<sup>9</sup>S. A. Kryzhanivs'ky, Sotsialistychnyj realizm--tvorchyy metod radyans'koyi literatury (Kiev, 1961), p. 50.

<sup>10</sup>Only in socialistic conflict does the spiritual quality of a hero appear. A romantic cannot reveal the history of a character if he departs from the dialectical understanding of the evolution of life, if he is not able to show the social significance of a conflict. Mykhaylo Levchenko, "Do problem suchasnoho romanu," Suchasnist' i maysternist', p. 349.



Kysil. The conflict is epitomized in the dramatic scene in which the kolkhoz is being inspected by Kysil. Marko is in grave danger when his superior threatens to present a false report to the Central Committee. Just at that moment the First Secretary of the Central Committee arrives and renews his acquaintance with Marko. It was he who had presented to Marko the Order of Lenin at Stalingrad. After listening attentively to Marko's explanation of his differences with Kysil (who, in the meantime, is speechless with fear and confusion), Khrushchev takes the necessary action, and truth triumphs over falsehood. The problem is thus resolved by the introduction of an external agent who alone, by the very power of his authority, can render the correct solution. The nature of this technical device, deus ex machina, makes the resolution artificial and unsatisfactory.

What is convincing is Stelmakh's treatment of the peasants and their way of life. He not only incorporates human defects into them, but treats them sympathetically. The stepsister of Hryhoriy, Stepanyda, reveals a degree of cynicism--a grave shortcoming--but Stelmakh describes her with much compassion. Another character, the village priest, is afflicted by gluttony and alcoholism; he is dealt with humourously, if not with a tinge of pity. In idealizing the beautiful in peasant life, the peasants do not emerge "black" or "white," but simply as people within whom are the seeds of their own salvation.



The novel is profoundly Ukrainian in its thematics, kolkhoz life, since it abounds with national forms in language, folksongs, legends, sayings, and idioms. In this sense it satisfies the requirements of narodnist', a basic tenet of socialist realism.<sup>11</sup> The focus, however, is not on the collective, but rather on the individual and his moral attitude. Thus, the novel is not entirely in conformity with socialist realist principles.

Symbolism is Stelmakh's favorite device in expressing his philosophy. The narrator and characters think in terms of concrete images that are taken from natural surroundings often implying a metaphysical meaning. Natural elements become the source of Stelmakh's conceptualization of reality and act as his medium of communication. The bees symbolize the peasants. The land and the seed are the source of the truth, and the fate of man lies in the fate of the land. A dominant motif is the parallel between the peasant and the sunflower.

"What is our peasant at this time?" Brovarnyk liked to philosophize over a drink now and then. "He is a sunflower! His head stretches towards the sun, and his roots towards the earth. And what does he require for full bloom and prosperity? More sunshine and fewer sparrows that remove the seed. At the moment this sunflower is saddened, for what is there that they will not take away from him and who is there that will not subdue him! But a time will come and a real master will drive away the sparrows and all those others [i.e., the opportunists] who earlier took aim at the seeds of grain, who will drive away the parasites and cut-throats and

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<sup>11</sup>Anatoliy Moroz, "Pro narodnist' v literaturi," Pytan-nya ukrayins'koyi radyans'koyi literatury (Kiev, 1958), p. 114.



obliterate all those dark misunderstandings and bureaucratic instances that stand between the sunflower and the sun.<sup>12</sup>

An implicit organic unity exists between Stelmakh's philosophy and his personification of the natural world giving weight to the symbolism. The whole is a metaphorical painting of particular tones, story-like personifications and associations. Often Stelmakh's associations are laboured and the texture too heavy. The major tonality of his language is one of lyricism frequently taking flight in romantic pathos. The author's narration permeated with his passionate feelings convince the reader of his genuine concern for mankind, particularly for the peasants of Ukraine.

As a novel of socialist realism, Pravda i kryvda remains weak and unconvincing. The role of the Communist Party, the collective, and the Revolution, having no real meaning or significance, are only superficially woven into the fabric. As a work that continues in the tradition of the Ukrainian romanticists, especially Yuriy Yanovsky,<sup>13</sup> and other writers like Kotsyubynsky and Panas Myrny,<sup>14</sup> the novel is clear, comprehensible, and meaningful. Stelmakh is closer to his fore-runners of the past than to writers of the present time. An infusion of elements solely to satisfy the demands of socialist

<sup>12</sup>Stel'makh, Pravda i kryvda, p. 220.

<sup>13</sup>O. N. Grechina, "Romany M. Stel'makha," Sovyetska-ya literatura (Leningrad, 1962), p. 77.

<sup>14</sup>Yuriy Burlyay, Pro Mykhayla Stel'makha (Kiev, 1962), p. 121.



realism does not strengthen the novel. Rather this diminishes the overall effect of Stelmakh's more basic and positive attributes that constitute his particular manner of writing--his romantic style, his deep humanism, and his genuine concern for the good.



## CHAPTER V

### COMPARISONS AND EVALUATIONS

In comparing and evaluating the novels in question, it is necessary to view them against the literary atmosphere in which they were written, since they reflect sharply the literary policies of their respective periods. A closer re-examination of those fluctuations in Party policy would be advantageous in comparing the three novels. Haryachi pochuttya and Praporonostsi, appearing in 1947 and 1948 respectively, are products of the so-called Zhdanov period. This period, characterized by rigid Party control of the arts, is generally regarded as the bleakest and most sterile in Soviet Ukrainian literature.<sup>1</sup> The purpose of the policies that characterize this period was to counteract tendencies which had developed during the War years. A speech made by Stalin on February 9, 1946, indicated a shift in cultural policy. He remarked that writers must depict the old theory of two irreconcilable hostile worlds and aim for anti-Western agitation. Soviet literature was required to "convince the reader of the advantages of the Soviet social order, to counterbalance the lies and

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<sup>1</sup>W. N. Vickery, "Zhdanovism (1946-1953)," Literature and Revolution in Soviet Russia, 1917-1962, ed. Hayward and Labedz, p. 99.



slander of our enemies."<sup>2</sup> It was a pronounced return to unrestrained glorification of the Party and State. Critics denounced writers for a lack of purposefulness and political awareness. Another problem raised was that writers wrongly emphasized Ukrainian nationalism at the expense of Soviet patriotism. This confusion of two types of patriotism, Soviet critics claimed, obscured the new qualities of Soviet man and society.<sup>3</sup>

A decree issued by the Central Committee on August 14, 1946, containing the gist of two speeches by Andrei Zhdanov, set forth policies that were to prevail during the next fifteen years.<sup>4</sup> These speeches emphasized the educative function of literature, the duties of the writer to the people, Party, and State, and, above all, the necessary political orientation of art. Aesthetic significance of a literary work occupied a subordinate position in the official Soviet hierarchy of values.

In 1948 a growing dissatisfaction was evidenced and an effort was made to soften certain aspects of the post-war literary line. Cited as the main faults of current writing were schematism, repetition of one and the same theme, over-emphasis on social and political problems to the exclusion of human relationships, exaggerated didacticism, and low literary standards.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>2</sup>"Mirovoye znachenije russkoi kul'tury," Literaturnaya gazeta, cited by Swayze, Political Control of Literature in the USSR, pp. 32-33.

<sup>3</sup>Swayze, p. 35. <sup>4</sup>Literaturnaya gazeta, September 21, 1946.

<sup>5</sup>Swayze, p. 71.



The period up to Stalin's death witnessed a certain moderation of the stringency in cultural affairs. Proceedings of the Second Writers' Congress of 1954 indicated the intention of the union's top leaders to pursue a policy of "moderation,"<sup>6</sup> and events in 1955 indicated that the Party had acquiesced in a further, though limited, tempering of Zhdanovism.

Haryachi pochuttya and Praporonostsi, however, are products of the directives made in the early Zhdanov period of 1946 and are examples of that literature which later was criticized by Soviet critics. Pravda i kryvda was published in 1961 during the period of the "thaw," a time of the broadening of the borders in the method of socialist realism.

At the Twentieth Party Congress in 1956 Khrushchev, in denouncing Stalin and parts of the Stalinist heritage, traced the dictator's degeneration from 1934.<sup>7</sup> Even socialist realism was criticized at this time. Because it was canonized in the thirties, it was attacked on the basis that it was one of the pernicious outgrowths of Stalinism.<sup>8</sup> The reputations of many Soviet writers, denounced during the past twenty years or more, were rehabilitated. A concession was made that socialist realism must be interpreted more broadly. Writers in their works attacked spiritual apathy, official indifference, and

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., p. 107.

<sup>7</sup> For Khrushchev's speech, see New York Times, June 5, 1956.

<sup>8</sup> Literaturnaya gazeta, November 17, 1956, p. 3, and Sovetskaya kul'tura, November 17, 1956, p. 3.



the bureaucratic hierarchy which stifled humanism in the individual.

A turn in Soviet literary policy occurred in 1957 when the Party strove to harness those unorthodox forces released in the preceding year, and by the time of the Third Congress of Soviet Writers in 1959 the return to orthodoxy in Soviet policy was tempered by admission of shortcomings in certain details of the administration of the theory of socialist realism, but in principle the Party's cultural policies were unchanged.<sup>9</sup> In his speech at the Third Congress of Soviet Writers Khrushchev attempted to reassure writers of the essential moderation of the new orthodoxy.<sup>10</sup>

What survived, however, as a key feature of post-1956 Soviet literature, was a humanistic orientation of the writer. In the words of Harold Swayze, "the humanistic impulse, the yearning for truthfulness and sincerity, and the critical attitudes engendered by such tendencies persisted and continued to find expression, though more guardedly and often indirectly. . ."<sup>11</sup> Despite a hardening of the literary line Soviet writers found it possible to deal with subjects and themes forbidden during the worst years of Zhdanovism. This fact will become apparent when the three novels are compared in terms of

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<sup>9</sup>Swayze, p. 189.

<sup>10</sup>N. S. Khrushchov, "The Great Mission of Soviet Writers is to Serve the People," The Great Mission of Literature and Art (Moscow, 1964), pp. 64-96.

<sup>11</sup>Swayze, p. 218.



their conformities to, and divergencies from the method of socialist realism.

Every new age creates its own positive hero. The artistic portrayal of the New Man in a socialist society is a key to understanding the ideals toward which that particular social order strives. Epochs are closely bound up with the evolution of the positive hero<sup>12</sup> since this hero is an embodiment of the ideals of the society in which he lives. According to the theory of socialist realism, the positive hero must move from a lower level of spiritual existence to a higher level.<sup>13</sup>

The spiritual development of the positive heroes in Haryachi pochuttya and Praporonostsi is shown through their experiences as members of a collective. The development of Hontar, the hero of Haryachi pochuttya, is symbolic; from an ordinary iron-monger he becomes a person having responsibilities of leadership in his construction team. In Honchar's trilogy there is no single hero; several well-developed individuals represent the positive hero. Chernysh, Khoma Khayetsky, and others grow in stature through their war experiences. In these two novels the collective, symbolizing the nation, creates situations conducive to the transformation of the hero. This is in accordance with the requirement that writers show the

<sup>12</sup>Kryzhanivs'ky, Sotsialistichny realizm--tvorchy metod radyans'koyi literatury, p. 52.

<sup>13</sup>Leonid Kovalenko, "Obraz pozytyvnoho heroya v povovenniy prozi," Pytannya ukrayins'koyi radyans'koyi literatury (Kiev, 1955), p. 77.



nation creating heroes and, thus, moving history forward.<sup>14</sup> Stelmakh's Marko Bezsmertny, however, fits the mould of the ideal New Man from the beginning. His experiences in the collective of kolkhoz workers do not determine the nature of his character. In this respect the novel Pravda i kryvda is not socialist-realist in character since the hero's personality is not shown as a product of his socialist surroundings.

Another feature that makes a novel socialist realist in content is the typical nature of the hero. The hero of Haryachi pochuttya and those of Praporonostsi are typical of their communities. The pure and noble traits they possess are those that supposedly characterize all Soviet people. In describing them the authors simultaneously reveal traits existing in all members of the collective. The novel Pravda i kryvda has two kinds of heroes, but neither kind is that demanded by exponents of socialist realism. Stelmakh's peasants are more "grey" in colour than the "white" collectives of Bash's and Honchar's novels. They are not so completely devoid of weaknesses and, left to their own resources, are not as capable of overcoming obstacles. Marko Bezsmertny can hardly be considered typical of the mass in which he lives. He is invincible and there is no question about his ability and success in bringing about a better life for the peasantry. Marko is more a symbol of truth than an actual man.

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<sup>14</sup>Viktor Byelyayev, "Ukrayins'ky radyans'ky istorychny roman," ibid., p. 324.



Another difference in the characterization is that the heroes of the novels of the late forties represent all peoples of the Soviet Union. Bash and Honchar deliberately chose individuals from all levels and professions of Soviet life, from simple farm labourers and iron-mongers to intellectuals, mathematicians and academicians. Conscious efforts were made to represent many of the nationalities that comprise the Soviet Union. Stelmakh, however, chooses only one social group, the peasant class, and develops a romanticized and to some degree an idealized concept of peasant life. He makes no attempt to portray people of various nationalities: rather he follows a more natural impulse to characterize what is most familiar and, perhaps, most meaningful to him. The result is that Pravda i kryvda turns out to be a more natural and sincere work than the other two novels but less socialist-realist in character.<sup>15</sup>

The nature of negative characters underwent some change in the "thaw" period as compared to the Zhdanov period. This variance can be observed between the villains of Bash and Honchar and those of Stelmakh. Because literature of socialist realism was largely submerged in a wave of patriotism during the War and immediately afterward, and a campaign was launched against cosmopolitanism and bourgeois nationalism, negative characters were generally shown to be products of a capitalist and imperialist society.

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<sup>15</sup>Kobylets'ky, "Utverdzhennya metodu . . . ,"Suchasnist' i maysternist', p. 55.



In Haryachi pochuttya the American engineers and experts are portrayed as distinctly inferior to the Soviet workers. In Praporonostsi the capitalist nations are severely and relentlessly criticized as the victorious Red Army marches, bringing freedom with it into the "enslaved" countries of eastern Europe. The author directs his criticism at the capitalist system which, it is alleged, oppresses the people. This exaggerated glorification of all things Soviet was a result of the Communist Party's control and its many demands which had to be conscientiously carried out.

Stelmakh, however, less directly and vehemently criticizes outside forces, except for those of war and fascism. His attention is focussed upon Soviet society whose evils he attempts to reveal. Instead of the villain being an American, he is the Soviet bureaucrat and opportunist. Such characters are not depicted as isolated cases but as members of a numerous group. They are hard people, pitiless in their dealings with others, bullies, shouting and striking out at their inferiors. These new types are nihilists, skeptics, greedy people lamenting their fate. From their simple-minded efforts to succeed as tycoons and careerists follows a string of vices and abuses, culminating in serious crimes. They turn and twist insignificant, innocent facts into ominous offences. This change in the manner of characterization reflects Stelmakh's desire to end political repression and petty tyranny at all levels. The presentation of the selfish, suspicious, greedy individual in Soviet society



may be an admission that not everybody has been transformed into the New Soviet Man.

There appears to be an improvement in the portrayal of negative characters. Anton Bezborodko, Kysil, and Potsiluyko are much more developed than the negative characters of the other two novels. The former are not only dissimilar in their deeds but also in what results from their particular behaviour--their psychological state, their past experiences and education. Stelmakh pointedly establishes this information in order to make the characterization more profound and convincing. In his view the evil forces which they symbolize require as much attention as the positive forces. But the question of how and why such individuals have evolved in Soviet society, a question basic to the theme of good and evil, remains unanswered.

The author's concentration on the negative character has added an element of truthfulness to the picture he presents. Reality in novels of socialist realism very often was passed over in the name of an ideal, in the name of what ought to be.<sup>16</sup> This fact observed by Abram Tertz can be substantiated by an examination of the novels by Bash and Honchar. These novels reveal only the richness and grandeur of an ideal socialist society to the exclusion of any negative features of that society. In Haryachi pochuttya the writer was concerned with the glorification of a collective and the identification of the worker with the hydro-electric power plant on which he was working which

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<sup>16</sup>Tertz, On Socialist Realism, p. 10.



symbolized in turn, on a broad scale, the building of the communist society. In Praporonostsi this ideal took the form of a glorification of the patriotic character of the Soviet fighters comprising a great, moral collective. In both cases the collective appears unblemished and unmarred. In Pravda i kryvda, however, the hero is not the whole nation but rather the peasant class. This leaves Stelmakh more scope in developing the negative elements and their role in the novel. This freedom has resulted in a greater degree of objectivity generally.

Stelmakh's portrayal of actual life in Soviet Ukraine during 1945 makes his characters more natural and meaningful to the reader. The ideal hero and the idealized hero can be understood by various degrees of realism and "un-realism."<sup>17</sup> In Stelmakh the effectiveness of the characters is heightened by the counterposing of an ideal hero (the peasant) with the idealized hero (Marko Bezsmertny). One does not find these two kinds of positive heroes in the works of Bash and Honchar. The peasantry in Pravda i kryvda appears more human than Marko. It is curious to note that Stelmakh's sympathies are more with them than with the idealized Marko. The tendency to bridge the gap between the two extremes of good and bad individuals gives Stelmakh's novel greater depth, meaning, and significance. On the positive side there are the peasants who are not as idealized an Marko Bezsmertny and consequently more credible. On

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<sup>17</sup> Stepan Kryzhanivs'ky, Khudozhni vidkrytta (Kiev, 1955), p. 55.



the negative side we have Anton Bezborodko who is by nature not as evil as the administrator Kysil. For example, Marko attempts to persuade Anton, who is not as incorrigible as either Kysil or Potsiluyko, to marry the young peasant girl carrying his child: Anton is redeemable; the others are not.

A predominant feature resulting in a lowering of standards in Soviet literature during the late forties was the glorification of Stalin, now referred to as one manifestation of the cult of personality. The Party official appears in these works as the New Man par excellence. He is the spiritual guide of others whom he reaches by example. He is responsible for the proper course of affairs in the district and the collective. His role is to educate the others, guide them toward a life of higher moral standards. Generally he is not the main character because of his uncomplicated nature and his straightforward purpose and role. In Haryachi pochuttya this Party official was Znamensky, while in Praporonostsi he appears as Vorontsov and in the person of Lenin, symbolized by the letter "L."

At the Twentieth Communist Party Congress writers were urged to divest their works of the last obvious traces of the Stalinist mentality and to criticize the cult of the personality. Stelmakh responds to this request and, although his criticisms are veiled, they are clear enough for the reader to safely assume that he has Stalin in mind when he writes

"For so many of us have been judged, that many of the weaker people have not blossomed, but withered. . . . I, also, Hryhoriy Stratonovych, drank my cup in the year 1938. It did not perforate my heart. But



I saw many people in these years broken. . . . I don't know who philosophized deceitfully during that time, who was its black or, perhaps, blind author, who sinned terribly not knowing our people, nor believing in them, or even hated us. But he, like a snake, underhandedly weakened<sup>18</sup> not only our strength, but also our love and faith."

Idealization of the Party official, however, is re-established in the person of Khrushchev, who determines the outcome of good over evil and strengthens Marko's faith in Soviet power. The three novels, therefore, are basically similar in this respect and satisfy this requirement of socialist realism.

Themes vary to a large extent between the novels of Bash and Honchar and that of Stelmakh. In Pravda i kryvda more attention is focussed on the Soviet society rather than on the "imperialist" and "capitalist" societies, while the other two works prominently feature a comparison of the opposing social orders. Stelmakh is more concerned with the good and bad emerging in a socialized society; this leads him to deal with the individual rather than the collective. He emphasizes the development of individuals and their interrelationships rather than a singular collective where one major character is representative of all people in that community.

A minor deviation in subject matter in post-1956 works as compared to those of the immediately preceding period is the admission of the gulf between slogans or press reports and the realities of Soviet life. In Pravda i kryvda the negative characters' crime of distorting facts illustrates this point.

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<sup>18</sup>Stel'makh, Pravda i kryvda, p. 67.



An increasing demand exists for more truthfulness in public and private life since a good portion of the plot is concerned with an expose of present and past wicked deeds of certain people and their inevitable judgement and punishment. Significantly, in Pravda i kryvda highly-placed officials are criticized, while in Haryachi pochuttya and Praporonostsi only the petty officials and bureaucrats are censured. These criticisms in the former work, however, are directed only at members of the administrative apparatus and not at leaders of the Party. This is still a departure from the former tendency of depicting Soviet officials as being infallible. Greater flexibility and less red tape in the Soviet system is emphasized when Stelmakh shows individual initiative as a requisite to the building of a Utopian life. He devotes more attention to the concrete, material improvement in living conditions as well as the spiritual regeneration of Soviet man.

In 1954 a new demand for emotional satisfaction was felt.<sup>19</sup> It was brought about by the incorporation of a new element in Soviet literature, humanism, through which the writers' desire for a code of human values was expressed. What was missing from Soviet literature of the nineteen forties was namely humanity, the human being and his feelings. The superficial or cursory treatment of the individual's inner life is a feature of the novels Haryachi pochuttya and Praporonostsi.

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<sup>19</sup>George Gibian, Interval of Freedom (Minneapolis, 1960), p. 105.



What sets these works apart from Pravda i kryvda is the more profound and effective characterization in the latter through which Stelmakh attempts to explain the enigmatic question of right and wrong. Thus Stelmakh suggests that goodness consists in exhibiting confidence in and respect toward human beings, all of whom require a feeling of personal dignity. One episode in Pravda i kryvda illustrates this. Marko strongly feels that the unmarried Mavra should not live in self-imposed confinement, but should proudly go about in society carrying her unborn child; in his opinion, whether legitimate or illegitimate, the child should be considered a gift of good fortune. To instil some self-respect in the despondent Mavra, Marko offers his name for the child. In the character of Marko one sees a greater emphasis on the qualities of tolerance and forgiveness than in the heroes of Bash and Honchar.

Stelmakh's development of the inner life of his characters is markedly superior to that of the other two authors. In the case of the latter, individuals are devoid of practically all personal life that is not conceived as an extension of their public life. Love and sex was invariably subordinated to the social achievements, commitments, and concerns of the characters. Hontar takes his leave of both women on the banks of the Dnieper, leaving a clear path in life before them, and an unhindered road for himself so that he may proceed freely toward new achievements in building the socialist society. In Praporonostsi Chernysh does not marry Shura in deference to Bryansky's



existence. A love affair between Shura and Chernysh would endanger the existence of the ideal that Bryansky symbolized and, consequently, the ideology upon which all Soviet soldiers based their existence.

The family was regarded by Engels as an exploitive institution to be either abolished or fundamentally reformed in a socialist society.<sup>20</sup> In both their novels Bash and Honchar deliberately present woman liberated from the drudgery of work in the home, and put in a position of equality with man. Two essential features of the Marxist programme on the question of woman, the acceptance of the communal way of life and the abolition of the unitary family, are clearly shown in the works.

The resurgence of humanism during the succeeding period influenced and changed the treatment of love, family life, and even the portrayal of woman to a significant degree in Pravda i kryvda. Love makes its comeback as one of the primary expressions of the new humanism. It takes on many forms in the author's numerous discussions of human goodness and evil. Stelmakh treats it as important for the individual and discusses it in a more profound and frank manner than either Bash or Honchar. The concept of love is fundamental to Stelmakh's philosophy. The capacity for love and compassion in man determines the victory of good over evil. Family life, which has its roots in the spontaneous love between man and woman, is sacred for Stelmakh. Children, the fruits of love, are to be cherished.

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid., p. 74.



The role of woman as mother and wife achieves breadth in his novel and holds a dominant position in his philosophy. The woman does not sacrifice her personal life for her work on the kolkhoz. Even patriotic feelings take on a different colouration in Stelmakh's novel because of this new humanism. Instead of man behaving in the name of the nation or of the mass, an individual's conduct is in the name of man himself.

One of the fundamental standards for estimating the merit of a literary work of socialist realism is the truthfulness, or party-minded spirit, of the work's portrayal of reality. "Truthfulness" may be taken to denote two concepts. It may signify the correspondence of the work's content to an external reality, or it may signify the internal coherence of a work. Internal coherence is a function of the unity of a writer's concept or understanding with his technical skills--"the unity of form and content."

In Stelmakh's Pravda i kryvda internal coherence is present in one respect but absent in another. With the theme of good and evil Stelmakh attempts to fuse a secondary theme, the role of the Party leader as instrumental for the outcome of good over evil. A unity of form and content exists only between his philosophic reflections on life and literary devices used to convey these ideas. No fusion takes place, however, between communist ideology and his major theme for his own personal thoughts on life completely overshadow those ideas intended for political purposes. In fact, the socialist propaganda detracts



the reader's attention and lessens the effect and significance of Stelmakh's own personal message about love.

This negating duality exists neither in Haryachi pochuttya nor in Praporonostsi. In both, the authors confine their intellectual content to the communist ideology. In the latter work, the unifying of form and content is one of its best literary attributes. Consistent ideological preoccupation in both novels effects a stronger work, a quality lacking in Pravda i kryvda. Sincerity, however, should be the proper aim of a writer. A prerequisite for stirring readers as stated by L. Mikhaylova, a representative Soviet literary figure, is "the poet's own excitement, his sincere, organic belief in what he says."<sup>21</sup> What this means is that sincere belief in the Communist Party or any other ideology or philosophy will not impede creative activity but will be beneficial to it. Books cannot be ordered or planned; their composition must be determined by the author's spontaneous, immediate emotions. Bash and Honchar sacrifice credibility in the interest of an orthodox work of socialist realism. Though embellishing certain aspects of reality, Stelmakh does not extinguish the sincerity of his portrayal of the life of the peasant. Because his examination of peasant life is not organically related to ideological considerations, the value of Pravda i kryvda as a socialist-realist work is diminished.

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<sup>21</sup>"Gruz starykh oshibok," Literaturnaya gazeta, July 31, 1951, cited by Swayze, p. 19.



In order for literature to be an effective medium of indoctrination, it has to meet certain technical standards peculiar to it.<sup>22</sup> Toward the end of the Zhdanov period greater stress was laid on artistic quality and craftsmanship of realism. Prose writers were required to write without any "alien" formalistic tendencies and were to base their works on factual material in revealing the "truth of life."<sup>23</sup> Bash's narrative style is almost devoid of any images of an abstract or ambiguous character. Haryachi pochuttya lacks any metaphor or other poetic device except for occasional descriptions of the Dnieper River. Its style is clear, impersonal, and simple, as if it were meant solely for the unsophisticated, newly-literate public.

Honchar's style in Praporonostsi, by comparison, reveals greater artistry, perhaps as a response to the request for more technically advanced works. Distinctive and superior in the style is the lyrical romanticism employed by a master. Honchar purposely varies the language to distinguish one character from another. Although dissimilar in speech and appearance, the characters are merely a group of stereotyped, stock figures whose thoughts, feelings, responses, and points of view are the same.

In terms of technical artistry, Pravda i kryvda is the superior of the three novels. It contains more than just a

<sup>22</sup> Yarmolinsky, Literature Under Communism, p. 131.

<sup>23</sup> Borys Kovalenko, Literaturno-krytychni stati (Kiev, 1962), passim.



reportorial or lyrical narrative because of its complexity of design and subject matter. Stelmakh's romanticism is idealistic and philosophical rather than realistic. This tendency is in opposition to the basic characteristics of Soviet proletarian literature. His images and abstractions acquire metaphysical meanings and connotations that yield a style more dynamic than those of Bash and Honchar. Stelmakh's lyricism differs from Honchar's since it is poetic and allegorical. Folklore, typically Ukrainian epithets, and idioms find a very real place in the composition. Stelmakh has been criticized by Soviet Ukrainian literary critics namely for what enhances the work--his subjective and individual style.<sup>24</sup>

In 1953 the Soviet literary world witnessed the appearance of an essay by V. Pomerantsev titled "On Sincerity in Literature." In this daring and dangerous article that posed a threat to ideological conformity, Pomerantsev asserts that "the degree of sincerity, that is, the directness of things, must be the first standard of evalution."<sup>25</sup> If one is to consider this standard as a criterion of a work's literary merit, then Stelmakh's novel Pravda i kryvda ranks highest. If, however, one is to consider "party-mindedness"--the infusion of communist ideology--and the fulfillment of other requirements of socialist realism, then Honchar's trilogy, Praporonostsi, must be acknowledged as the better work.

<sup>24</sup>Gibian, Interval of Freedom, p. 12.

<sup>25</sup>V. Pomerantsev, "Ob iskrennosti v literature," Novy mir, No. 12, 1953, p. 219.



### Conclusions

Soviet literary works before and after 1956 are basically alike in their approach to life. The similar conclusions that Bash, Honchar and Stelmakh arrive at in their novels are the result of the singular way a Soviet writer is required to view reality. A major development in Soviet literature evidenced in Pravda i kryvda was that the "seamy" side of Soviet life could be admitted, but only if the over-all effect was favourable and the outcome positive and optimistic.

Fundamentally, there are three standards for estimating the merit of a Soviet literary work: the "truthfulness"<sup>26</sup> of a work's portrayal of reality, the work's pedagogic potential, and its intelligibility to the broad masses. Each is a requisite for transforming literature into a serviceable social tool. Although the Communist Party has made compromises, two key doctrines of Soviet Ukrainian literature remain unchallenged: Party control over literature, and the sole admissible method of socialist realism.<sup>27</sup> Freedom in creative endeavour is not complete for true creativeness implicitly threatens a doctrine that is conservative and inflexible toward whatever is profoundly original. Those qualities that make literature a potential danger are precisely the ones that render literature useful to the Soviet regime.<sup>28</sup>

<sup>26</sup>"Truthfulness" here is understood in terms of party-minded spirit.

<sup>27</sup>Burlyay, Mykhaylo Stel'makh, Literaturny portret, p. 115.

<sup>28</sup>Swayze, p. 24.



The three novels vary in style and in content, but their purpose is the same--the ideological transformation and education of the masses in the communist spirit. Communism must inevitably triumph. For this reason the novels are dogmatic and sterile, and the authors' philosophies naive. If an author deviates from the prescribed formula (as Stelmakh did in style), then he is criticized for being too subjective. It must be acknowledged, however, that Party control has not extinguished in Soviet Ukrainian prose a variety of talents, ideas, forms, and a continuing search for new modes of expression.

Only with reference to the principles of socialist realism to which a writer is confined and only against the background of official literary policy can one understand and analyze Soviet socialist-realist prose. By examining Ukrainian prose in terms of Soviet policy it becomes evident that at any particular time it is produced in response to a demand either for literature of greater political content or for literature of higher aesthetic standards. The task of the Soviet writer is not an easy one, for he must write a work that aesthetically satisfies the reader within a literary atmosphere hardly conducive to self-expression. Under such circumstances one would expect a uniformity in the quality of Soviet literature. Instead, the novels examined here have shown that an interesting artistic diversity prevails from both Soviet and Western viewpoints making Soviet Ukrainian prose a worthwhile object of investigation.



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